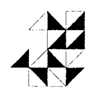
Prism Literary Series (12)



CLEOPATRA WORSHIPS PEACE

by

AHMED ETMAN

Translated with an introduction by

Amal Aly Mazhar

MINISTRY OF CULTURE, EGYPT
FOREIGN CULTURAL RELATIONS

Prism Literary Series 12
Published by
Foreign Cultural Information Dept.

Prism Publications Office
44, Messaha St., Guizeh, Egypt

First English Edition 2002

Dar Al-Kuttub Registeration : 1924/ 2002

Contents

INTRODUCTION

Cleopatra Worhsips Peace (1984) by Ahmed Etman, professor of classical literature at the Department of Greek and Latin at Cairo University, Egypt, manifests his interests in the field of classical literature. However, the play is not a mere recording of well documented, historical events either from the occidental or oriental standpoints. As a staunch upholder of Cleopatra the seventh against her detractors, Etman transmutes his academic research which lasted for 10 years on this issue into a dramatic life to vindicate her true image from an Egyptian perspective. Faced with such a mythical figure of infinite, myriad facets, Etman set out to depict her from a modern perspective where Cleopatra the historically authentic figure transcends this status and becomes a symbol of Egypt whereby she becomes the bridge, rather than the barrier, between cultures.

Etman's play is, in actual fact, a revisionary act whereby he set out to rectify some occidental misconceptions regarding her character as propagated mainly by Plutarch's ***Lives of Illustrious Men*** and William Shakespeare's ***Antony and Cleopatra***. The first misconception of Cleopatra upheld by the accident as a "hedonist, over sexed women or a notorious prostitute", is met by his effort to construct an Egyptian Cleopatra whose emotional life constitutes merely one aspect of her character. On the other hand, he does not depict a victimized, emasculated Antony who is stripped of his manly power by Cleopatra's magic as Etman believes

that "Antony has not been destroyed by oriental hedonism embodied in Cleopatra, but rather by the skilfullness of his antagonists to exploit this aspect of his character as a weapon against him".

Moreover, in his play he sought to rectify the misconception regarding Cleopatra as the ambitious ruler who "planned to have an Empire of her own or rather to restore the Ptolemaic Empire of the golden age".

Another Western misconception regarding Cleopatra's treachery and betrayal of Antony in Actium is revealed as a myth as "recent historical researchers ... show that there was no actual fight in Actium, because Antony and Cleopatra planned for an honourable withdrawal to get ready afterwards for a decisive battle elsewhere" (3). Etman, furthermore expresses his belief that it is not fair to interpret the results of Actium battle through the writings of the Greek and Roman authors of the Augustan period. "These authors were not seeking to find and say the truth. They were only directed to sing the glories and heroic achievements of the Roman soldiers and leaders" (3). Etman highlights Cleopatra as the new Isis the Egyptian goddess referred to in the play as "the goddess of fidelity constancy and endurance".

Cleopatra the seventh, the Egyptianized queen of Ptolemaic Greek origins ruling in a Hellenistic world i.e. the Hellenic civilization blended with the oriental heritage is dramatized by Etman as symbolic of Egypt as a crucible where diverse cultures, languages harmoniously blend together, rather than jar with each other.

This dramatic vision clearly transcends the bigotry of racial or cultural superamcy of one race or culture over another. Thus, Cleopatra in Etman's play, to borrow the modern idiom, represents a dialogue, rather than a clash between cultures and civilizations. This unique characteristic of Egypt as a melting pot of different races and cultures in one homogeneous whole has been attested since ancient times. Thus the significance of the merging of classical mythology represented by Hercules (power & courage) and Dionysius (joy of life) and the Egyptian Goddess Isis, the symbol of fertility, motherhood and constancy.

Etman's interest in drama, both ancient and modern, classical and Arabic made him absorb and assimilate various influences and trends. Etman's interest in Brechtain epic dramaturgy of the conscious breaking of the dramatic illusion is explicitly spelt out at the outset of the play in the Director's words who fully upholds such Brechtain principles. The breaking of the dramatic action is witnessed in the active participation of the actress impersonating Cleopatra questioning the authenticity of the encounter between Cleopatra and Herod.

Furthermore, Pirandollesque influence in the play is mainly detected in Etman's interest in depicting the relationship between stage and life by destroying the naturalistic convention of the fourth wall and bringing the audience face to face with the bare bones of the theatrical technique. This is clearly detected in the opening of the play.

Pirandello's interest in the multiplicity of personality is

seen in the Director's bewildered response to the Dramatist's question as to the real identity of the actress "As far as I'm concerned, it makes no difference whether she's an actress I magine to be the historical Cleopatra or that latter who's come in person to act her role. The ingenious artist my dear, lives his art, you can't distinguish between the actor and the character he's impersonating".

This is further spelled out in the actress' words in which she obliterates the demarcating line between her reality and that of the clwo she impersonates. Despite taking off her historical attire she can no longer distinguish between illusion and reality. Adamant in her objection to Cleopatra's so-called claimed encounter with the Jewish king Herod, she majestically addresses the Dramatist in her capacity as the real Cleopatra.

> I know exactly where I stand ... I'm mistress of my own fate maker of my history. I hereby insist on ommitting the Jewish scene and keeping the Arab one.

Etman was influenced by Pirandello who broke the illusion of the fourth wall and in order to establish the relativity of reality, the actors impersonate false spectators. Obviously appropriating Pirandello's unique technical device in the active involvement of the audience, Etman constructs the last scene in Act I on these same lines. The two actors impersonating false spectators intervene to cut short the heated argument over Cleopatra's inauthenticated visit to Herod of Jewry. Such legitimate appropriation of

Pirandellian technique indicates only too clearly that Etman was striving to make the stage regain its active role by allowing the full communication between the stage and the auditorium such as that witnessed in the Golden Ages of classical literature.

In both content and dramatic structure, Etman's play is a clear case in point of the merging of, and the dialogue, not the clash between different cultures and civilizations.

Characters of the Play
in Order of Appearance

The Dramatist : Also acts Enobarbus' part.

The Director : Also acts Antonius' role.

Cleopatra The Seventh : Queen of Egypt.

Irene and Charmion : Cleopatra's maids.

Antonius : Marcus Antonius the famous Roman general now middle aged.

Pothinius : Cleopatra's counsellor.

Achilles : General in the Egyptian army.

The Egyptian Messenger : On behalf of Cleopatra and Antonius.

Malek : King of the Arab Empire

Sheikh 1, Sheikh 2, Sheikh 3 : Sheiks of the Arab tribes.

Herod : King of the Jews.

Minister : King Herod's minister.

Member of the audience 1, Member of the audience 2 : Take part in the dialogue from the auditorian

Enobarbus : One of Antonius' men.

Eros : Antonius' follower always accompanies him.

Octavius : Later Emperor Augustun, now still a youth.

Maecenas : Senior minister with Octavius.

Roman Messenger : Octavius' messenger.

The Soothsayer : The Foreteller

Egyptian guard 1

Egyptian guard 2

Hercules : Greek Arch hero

Dionysius : Greek God of Wine.

Isis : Ancient Egyptian Goddess.

Olympus : Cleopatra's physician.

Lady one, Lady two : Appear to Antonius in a dream

Selekos : Cleopatra's treasurer

Dolabella : One of Octavius' men

Silent Followers, servants, soldiers .... etc.

ACT I

Scene I

[*A dramatist's study. He is sitting at his huge desk with some books in front of him, the library shelves packed with books behind him. The director is sitting on a chair opposite the dramatist, sipping his coffee*].

Dramatist : No ! Don't do that again to me ! Don't ask me to do the most inappropriate thing at the most inappropriate time ! coming to me, as you do now, to ask me to write a play !! Now ?!

Director : And why not ?!

Dramatist : Why not ?! Have you lost your feelings ? Have your senses blunted ? Everybody's in a state of gloom and grief – depressed – frustrated – a shattering defeat – totally unprecedented in the entire history, an earth – shaking catastrophe, a disaster ... which ...

Director [*Interrupting*] : I know ... I know ... a horrendous disaster and a shattering catastrophe ... etc, etc, etc. I'm fully aware of all this because I actually live it, through books, tears of people, in their talks and silence, in their dreams and their moments of consciousness as well. I know that my countrymen are torn with grief, devastated by anguish, butchered by disgrace, I'm aware of

all that, but I simply believe that this is the most convenient, time for creativity.

Dramatist : Have you gone mad ? Have you lost your senses ? Creativity indeed! What do I write to people in such circumstances ? I've got nothing to tell them! Do I write them a light comedy, or perhaps one full of triumphant marches and festive tunes ? Perhaps even, I should I tell them that what befell them was not really a defeat in the proper sense of the word but, may be, in fact, just a "set back" and that if one major loses one round in the battle, it does'nt mean that he's finally lost the war ?!

Director : That's precisely what I'd like you to write about !

Dramatist : All right then ! Since you know what's required why don't you write it yourself ? For my part I can't write such nonsense.

Director : This means that you're incapable of coping with the times and reflecting the status quo.

Dramatist : Yes, that's absolutely impossible, that is, as far as I'm concerned.

Director : All right then! I've got another suggestion. Let's join our efforts together to write this work I feel so desperately in need of making it come into existence. I can't resist my feelings.

My dear director! since you feel this urgent need, then do it yourself. But as for me, don't press me to do it for as far as this is concerned I'm very much at ease. [*Getting up, thus implying to the director that their discussion has come to an end.*]

Dramatist [*Holding him by the shoulders and forcing him to sit*] : Don't rush. I'm only asking you to allow me discuss the idea with you. No, it's not even that, I'll only draw a sketchy plan of the plot and you fill in all the details - that is, I'll draw the skeleton and leave you to cover it with flesh.

Director : Flesh and meat indeed! Where in heaven's name do I find this meat ? Please, Mister don't even as much as mention the word "meat" to my ears, I'm stuck — I'm in a tight squeeze. I'm not in the least inclined to write.

Dramatist : Then I'm only requesting you to listen to me throughout — you may like my idea — we'll flee this bitter, nasty reality and take refuge in the world of myth and history.

Director : Oh, yes submerge and drown the people still more in illusions and fantasies and make matters worse. Nothimg has really destroyed this nation more than clinging to false fantasies and deceptive dreams. We were told

that our enemy would not resist our triumphant army more than a few hours, only to find out that the enemy, finding no resistance on our part, invaded the whole country.

Director [*Interrupting*] : Stop it ! Everyone knows all this, and what's more, it's an actuality we're surviving with, one which you can virtually touch with your own hands, what we need now is work.

Dramatist : D'you call what you are doing now "WORK ?" Isn't it better for us now to carry arms and defend our country ?

Director : Fighting is not our role. We've got to use writing as our weapon, not necessarily against our enemy, but in the face of backwardness and corruption, to conquer our own frailities first, advance intellectually and culturally, cleanse and purge ourselves from the shame of defeat. Victory will eventully crown our efforts on the battlefield – My dear dramatist, it's a cultural warfare !

Dramatist [*Sarcastically*] : You intend that we level our nuclear weapons at myths and historical events ?! Ha !!

Director : No, my dear,we'll simply immerse our pens in the ink of history and myth only to draw and colour the portrait of a painful, heart - rending present.

Dramatist : This will, by necessity, force us to twist mythical stories and historical events to suit facts from the present. In other words we'll forge the present to make it correspond with the grandeur of myth and the splendour of history. No wonder then if we find a play that depicts our defeated, crushed head of state to be a Hercules, the grand and supreme hero, the Arch Conqueror ! Why, we may even also portray him as Ahmus or Joan of Arc or Khaled Ibn Al Waleed ! Why, if creative ingenuity is triggered in us, we may also persuade people that our president is the exact replica of Salah Al Deen the conqueror !

Director [*Laughing*] : Oh, No, No ! But you've forgotten another Egyptian figure in whose life myth and history blend, and under whose rule Egypt suffered a terrible defeat.

Dramatist : Who d'you mean ?

Director : Cleopatra the Seventh, the last Ptolemaic monarch.

Dramatist [*Surprised*] : Cleopatra !! This is the last character who should be recalled to mind now, and in these conditions in particular.

Director : I absolutely disagree with you on this point. She's the character who's popped to my mind from the distant abyss of history ever since the

dismal national catastrophe befell our country.

Dramatist : I may agree with you that she was actually a dismal historic disaster disgracing Egypt and bringing about Roman occupation ... and ...

Director : These are the commonly accepted views in history books and among people. They are, however, debatable views.

Dramatist : Here you are from the very outset starting a process of forging history to write what appeals to you.

Director : Oh, that's not true !But I do believe that a creative writer is capable of reading between the lines in history books, to read what is not actually written, and hear what people have not actually uttered, then write what he reads and hears, that which has never been written nor said before.

Dramatist [*Astonished and taken aback*] : I thought you were a director. But it seems that you've been transformed ino a creative writer and an excellent one to boot. Well, your views place the creative dramatist on the verge of insanity. He reads what's not written, and hears those who don't speak, and communicates with those who have no existence — Isn't that insanity ?!

Director : O.K, granted that this is so — How sweet

insanity would be then ! My dear dramatist ! To come to your wit's end in the conditions we're living in is far better than grasping or conceiving what really happened [*grabbing him*] : Come on let's start work, don't be idle. Stop being sluggish. We'll collaborate together in writing and directing. What's more than that, we'll involve with us some actors in amending and rectifying the tales from myth and history. Besides, we'll ask the audience to participate in this theatrical process.

Dramatist : This is not drama or theatre at all ! You write and direct ! What actors write and direct, the audience instead of watching the performance, participates in making the play with us !! This is downright, absolute chaos !

Director : Call it chaos or whatever you will, but I assure you that it'll be a marvellous play, and much better than those written in study rooms and derived from yellow pages ....

Dramatist : Why attack me then ? I think you're accusing me of appropriating my plays ? why do you envy me when you know only too well that I've neither been a big shot nor earned a penny from them . Their performances were terminated as soon as they started.

Director : If you just condescend to collaborate with us

only this time you'll be a sucessful dramatist and a profiting one to boot. We'll be men of the theatre in the true sense of the word. Well, then! come on, we've got no time to lose [*bending his head*] : D'you know what we'll do?

Dramatist : What ?

Director : We'll phone Cleopatra the Seventh and ask her to come immediately.

[*Dialling the number*]

Dramatist [*Talking to himself*] : What a historic theatrical fiasco ! There's no doubt that our friend over there has lost his senses. Why not, if all the country has lost its senses ?! Defeated then claimed that it's victorious, insisting on keeping its leaders who led it to its defeat instead of see – king to rectify itself !

Director [*On the phone*] : Cleopatra ? good evening your majesty – Most illustrious and magnificent of all women ! Charmer of the entire world, enchantress throughout history – gift of time to the people of Egypt. In all frankness, Egypt is the gift of the Nile, and you're the gift of Aphrodite, goddess of beauty, love and fertility !

______ : ....

Director : Listen Cleopatra — Are you close by ?

——— : ....

Director : Marvellous ! splendid ! Come at once then, eh ! At once! [*placing the receiver*]

Dramatist [*Confused*] : My dear doting dramatist — oh ! I mean director — what Cleopatra will come soon ? Is there an Egyptian actress by the name of Cleopatra whom I don't know of ? or [*pointing to his head*] is she Cleopatra the seventh, queen of Ptolemaic Egypt ?

Director [*As in a reverie*] : What difference does that make ? As far as I'm concerned there's no difference whether she's an actress I imagine to be the historical Cleopatra or that latter who has come in person to act her role. The ingenious artist, my dear, lives his art, you can't distinguish between the actor and the character he's impersonating. Here I stand infront of you, talking to you but I actually live in the events of the year 31BC. [*Cleopatra enters dressed in her historical attire*]. And here comes the queen of Egypt . Let's get to work. I'll do Antonius' role, and from this moment onwards you'll be called Enobarbus.

Cleopatra [*Gesturing with her hand*] : One moment please. I've one thing to ask before we start work.

Director : What's that ?

Cleopatra : To have the right to interfere every now and then because the ancients have forged history and distorted my image to the people. Hence I insist on my right to depict my story, add to or cross out what doesn't correspond to my character — Agreed ?

Director and Dramatist together : We're not entitled to an objection ! You're the heroine of the historical events as well as of the theatrical performance.

The three together : Come on then, to the scene of events.

Scene II

[The Egyptian leading ship of Cleopatra, the Antoniad on board of which all her treasures are kept. The ship is heading towards Egypt. Cleopatra and Antonius are on board after their defeat in Actium. Cleopatra sits in the prow amidst her ladies in waiting while Antonius sits alone on the stern of the ship, holding his head in both hands. He is dejected and bends down every now and then, raises his head to stare in all directions, then sighs in despair and sorrow. The guards in attention stand on both sides of the ship holding their weapons, watching the sea from all directions, as well as Antonius' and Cleopatra's movements.]

Irene : Your majesty, queen Cleopatra, don't be too harsh on yourself and your love, master of the East and father of your children. Wisdom dictates that you overcome this setback. It's merely an accidental crisis, which only delays your policy, but doesn't destroy it. You've lost a battle and there are doubtlessly other inevitable battles to come. War has its ups and downs, retreat and attack victory and defeat. Your interest, as well as that of all Egypt and the entire East, lies in your resistance and confrontation of this setback or temporary military defeat to eventually win the war. You have to support this Romen leader, this invincible fighter, the greatest hero the East

has ever witnessed [*She looks at Antonius and so does Cleopatra*]. D'you mark how the lord of the East sits ? He's been sitting like this for three days and nights, neither sleeping, eating nor drinking, never looking at any body. I'm afraid you'll lose this beloved hero for ever.

Cleopatra [*Whispering*] : Hush ! You're just an imbecile ! You know nothing, you understand nothing. Do you call Actium a "setback" or a "defeat" ? Call Actium "the end". Yes, everything is over you silly naive girl. Irene, Antonius is no longer master of the East, don't you understand? The legend of Antonius, the invincible leader is over, and Octavius now is master of the victorious army — invincible both on sea and land .

Charmian [*Interferes, whispering cunningly*] : But my lady and queen you still remain as you've always been – Cleopatra the supreme queen over all other kings of the East, enchantress, nay,lady of all Westren Emperors ! Will Octavius, this young Roman conqueror resist your seductive charm, o ....

Cleopatra [*Interrupting to scold her*] : What drivelling nonsense are you saying, you doting, senile woman. This is no time for joking.

Charmian [*Indifferently*] : I beg your pardon, my child.

All I meant to tell you that wisdom dictates that you carefully weigh matters to reach a better judgement. It's only wise to ally ourselves to the conquerors, not to follow in the trail of the conquered .

Cleopatra [*Angrily*] : You must've lost your senses. Be gone ! away with you this very moment !

[*Charmian withdraws silently*].

Irene : My lady and queen ! I beg your pardon on behalf of Charmian. I know what worries her. She considers you her own daughter. She's greatly concerned about your welfare and safety much more than she is over the most cherished thing in her life. She's alarmed lest matters would take such turn and final victory would befall on Octavius, that he would have the opportunity to lead you ....

Cleopatra [*Becoming alert, she stands upright*] : Yes, I know the fate of the defeated in war against the Romans. They take kings and queens captives of war, chain them by shackles, and drag them behind their carriages in triumphal processions. Don't forget that I myself have witnessed this scene when I was in Julius Ceasar's company in Rome and saw the bastard Romans chaining with shackles my obstinate sister Orsinory, then I saw them

driving her in the streets of Rome in degradation and humiliation, the mob and the riffraff scoffing and jeering at her. Orsinory had a temper, she was a violent girl. She rebelled against me and would have nothing to do with me, and thus rightly deserved that terrible fate. I did admire the dignity and pride in her behaviour and attitude even when she was shackled. As for me, I'll never allow the Romans to do the same thing to me. I'm preparing myself for all sorts of mishaps the humiliation of captivity and the betrayal of my love, ally and father of my children, Antonius. Moreover, I'...

Irene [*Politely*] : Allow me to interrupt your majesty in this respect to tell you since you've just mentioned Antonius' name, isn't it time to sit with him [*Both look at Antonius*] to negotiate together, bury your differences and reach a compromise before you approach Egypt without a preconceived plan and an agreement on what to tell the people who're dead worried?

Cleopatra : Well, well, you're right Irene this is what we should actually do but shame and fear shackle paralyse and stop me from approaching him. He flies in a rage, turns into a wild ox, an injured lion and like a ravenous animal he

attacks whoever comes in his way without distinguishing between friend and foe. What fiery, frightening looks flash from him everywhere ! Can't you see the angry looks in his eyes ?

Irene : Then allow me to go to him [*Hesistantly*] on condtion that I take Charmian terrify with me. Your words me. In any case I beg of your majesty to pardon Charmian and allow her to accompany me in this dangerous errand.

Cleopatra : Tell her ... that I've forgiven her, take her with you to Antonius. I plead to the entire gods of Olympus to make your efforts prosper. May Divine Isis stand by you.

[*Irene moves in Charmian's direction – after a give and take they both approach Antonius who is not aware of them until they come close to him . As soon as he looks to them, they hurriedly retreat in fright towards Cleopatra.*]

Charmian : [Tripping and falling down at Cleopatra's feet]: Your majesty, the affliction that awaits us from the defeated Antonius' rage is no less dangerous than the different means of revenge of the conqueror Octavius . We are in both cases lost and afflicted [*She weeps*].

Cleopatra : Never mind Charmian, get up, don't panic.

Irene [*Frightened*] : Your majesty, save us, our lives are now in danger.

Cleopatra : I know what's on your mind Irene. I've made up my mind, I'm resolute to settle this matter. I'll go to him myself, it's not becoming to leave him in this condition. I'll go to bear his anger. I'll neither submit to my shame or fear in front of him, for in our cases time is so precious we can't let it slip away from us thus. [*She moves in Antonius' direction in steady steps, followed by Irene, Charmian but when she is close by she hesitates for a while and almost retreats especially when Antonius looks at her. Eventually, she plucks all her courage, falls at last upon him, caressing and embracing him*].

Antonius [*Standing upright thus making her fall to the ground*] **:** You deceitful woman, you frivolous, reckless queen – leave me, don't you speak to me now. You're the cause of my defeat, nay *you are defeat and shame*. You betrayed me and fled the battle before I had the chance to get involved in a real fight, you know that my fate is tied to yours and hence your flight from the battle is a betrayal to me ....

Cleopatra [*Standing up crying*] : O.K. all right if what you're saying is true just be fair and listen to a word from the defendant standing infront of you now ! After you listen, judge me as you will, I'm all yours, I'm at your beck and call.

Antonius : What's the use of words when the die is cast

and what's done cannot be undone ?

Cleopatra : But what's the use of silence and many other things are about to happen, other fates and threats storming us in the face on all sides ? Can't we redress the balance and do something?

Antonius : How can I ever count on you again ? Can I possibly allow myself to be stung from the same serpent again ?

Cleopatra : Nay, you'll find in Egypt a kind heart and an understanding, sympathetic people. What more do you need Antonius, strongest of men, arch hero and master of the East !

Antonius [*Sarcastically*] **:** Ha ! Master of the East indeed !

Cleopatra : Yes, you *are* master of the East, because you're master of Egypt and the queen of Egypt — doesn't that suffice you ? Well then be it known to you then Antonius that whoever has Egypt in his grip, holds the world .....

Antonius : ....

Cleopatra : Yes my lord Antonius, Emperor of the entire world, Egypt is on your side [*holding him*] all its possessions, treasures are at your disposal. The entire Egyptian gods and the people of Egypt back and support you. Then be it known

to you that I withdrew from the battle of Actium with the ship as well as others. Laden with treasures of gold and all fortunes of the East when I knew for certain that our enemy will inevitably win this battle. I deemed it wise to let him win this battle to save our treasures and seek refuge in our land then pull ourselves together and organize our troops once more then take up arms against him in an inevitable future confrontation with him.

Antonius : Was that really your plan you cunning serpent of the Nile ?

Cleopatra : Yes, Lord of the East — for your sake and that of Egypt. I would have done anything.

Antonius : Why didn't you tell me about this plan in advance ?

Cleopatra : I dropped many hints about this matter before the battle, but you were preoccupied with your military tactics. You followed your leaders' advice and kept at arms' distance from me during the battle so as not to be affected by my words and feminine feelings as they alleged. You did not observe well what I told you. Moreover, don't you understand now why was my insistence that the battle between us and Octavius would be at sea in spite of your leaders' Canidius and Enobarbus' insistance

that the war would be fought on land ?

Antonius : Yes, now only do I understand, but ....

Cleopatra [*Interrupting*] **:** What matters is that you put confidence once more in me. I'm your beloved wife Cleopatra.

Antonius [*Embracing her*] **:** Nay, let's notarize these words with a kiss, my bliss and healing cure – your kiss is worth all that I lost in Actium, it dresses all my wounds [*they embrace*] Oh men prepare the table for the food serve abundant wine, and forget the past !!

(Boisterous music)

Scene III

[Cleopatra's palace in Alexandria. The queen sits on the throne in all splendour, crown on head. Around her stand her women in waiting among them are charmian and Irene. Pothinius, the queen's counsellor enters]

Pothinius [*Bowing*] : Your majesty, descendant of kings – Immortal lady of Egypt, will you allow me to talk ?

Cleopatra [*Majestically*] : Say what you have in store and don't hesitate sincere counsellor.

Pothinius : Your majesty, rumours have started to spread among people ... such whispers are now audible to the extent that one feels them wherever one goes in the streets and narrow alleys of Alexandria - it's a roring whisper which defeans the ears.

Cleopatra [*As if talking to herself*] : Yes, that is what I've always felt too [*gradually raising her voice*] yes Pothinius - that's what I've already gathered while I was wandering disguised as usual in the alleys of Alexandria to keep abreast of my subjects' affairs, my ears were pierced by these whispers as though they were screams or thunders - and I understood their import.

Pothinius : Nay, my queen these roamings made rumours

and whispers spread all the more. Some Alexandrians have recognized you for they are brilliant and perceptive, and noticed that this time you're walking alone unaccompanied by your ally, master of the East, your husband and father of your children Antonius. Misgivings haunted their minds, for they started wondering about the disapperance of the Actium hero, when they fell short of information, they created their own stories and started doubting everything.

Cleopatra [*Taken aback*] : In what ? Everything ?

Pothinius : Yes, my queen. When our fleets returned from Actium with triumphal banners fluttering over them, the people danced and celebrated in the streets and cheered your life and the East. Their cheers resounded everywhere, in all languages, Egyptian, Arabic, Greek, Hebrew. They held boisterous celebrations for six days on end and added the fifth of September to the list of their national and religious feasts. They changed and amended in the calender to suit this feast, They have raised you to the pedestal of gods, you and your triumphant ally Antonius, Lord of the East ! But when they sought him just to win a glance, they failed in their endeavours. When his absence extended, they started whispering

amongst themselves, then rumours were exchanged openly until the revelation of the truth became a public request, explicitly thundering harrowing at our ears. Yes ! Your majesty your people want to know the truth of what happened on the 5th September in Actium.

Cleopatra [*Anxiously and upset*] : Oh how terrible! Have they actually reached the point of doubting our triumph on the 5th of September ?

Pothinius : What triumph are you talking about, your majesty ? Does it make sense that the triumphant general would return from the battle only to retire in a small palace to the far north of the city which he calls Timonion in imitation of the misanthropist Albeman Timon ? Who on earth would believe that the victorious in war would return from the battlefield to live in seclusion, hidden from the whole world and declines to meet any living soul except his own private guards ? My queen, before Actium the people were accustomd to seeing two merry, jovial comrades, merry-making and dancing, disgiusing and wandering at night in the streets of Alexandria, entertaining yourselves by pleasure trips on the clear Nile water in golden boats or catching fish at sunset. Where is that

company my queen which you called the club of unique life ? Romans have it that you founded instead a new club called "Death Company" for people regard Antonius' secluded life a sort of death. How could people imagine Antonius living without carousing and banquets, without dancing or bawdy parties ? Thus did the people know Antonius and loved him as such, as you yourself did. What I fear most my lady is that the people's suspicions would touch upon your love and that rumours would destroy the sacred bond between you.

Cleopatra [*Firmly*] : Shut up ! Beware of trespassing the limits of decorum in my presence and interfering in my private affairs.

Pothinius : Forgive me my queen. It's my duty that induces me to disclose to you the threats of the status quo, especially that there are other rumours which are no less dangerous.

Cleopatra [*Irritablly*] : O, the endless tales of rumours ! What more do they say than what you've already mentioned ?

Pothinius : They also say that you sent your eldest son Caesarion, son of Julius Caesar with infinite treasures to Upper Egypt to disappear there for a while then later on to travel to another place in the East via the Red Sea, and there, so the

rumours have it, you will later join him and establish a new kingdom, thanks to the Egyptian treasures which your son has carried.

Cloepatra [*In astonishment*] : They also know about Caesarion ?

Pothinius : Yes, my lady. Nothing is hidden from the sons of the Nile. They are simple, benevolent, yet are not naive or idiots. Moreover, the glaring sun of the valley has endowed them with such clairvoyance which enables them sometimes to perceive what the others, I mean their rulers, do to them. If they love their ruler they understand him fully and wholly confide in him and voluntarily yield to him. But if he squanders their rights, leads them astray and lies to them, they all become a hearing ear and a seeing eye. They become fully aware of his conduct, behaviour, every sign or gesture done openly or secretly. They hence become one, sarcastic, sharp tongued voice sharper than any sword, more devastating than any weapon. My queen, they strongly adore you, nay, even worship you wholly for they consider you another, new Isis who emerged to save them from the perils they encounter. But now they are on the verge of losing their confidence in you as well as in themselves because the events have almost driven them mad. They

even claim that you yourself are presently making arrangements to flee Egypt, leaving the country an easy prey to the Roman legions about to invade us from the North.

Cleopatra (*In terror*) : Woe and alas from the curiosity of the people ! I ask them nothing more than patience and silence.

Pothinius : My queen, it is my opinion to reveal to your people the truth before you lose them forever. Admit to them the defeat at Actium.

Cleopatra : Do you call it a defeat ?

Pothinius : A set back then. Words do'nt matter, what really matters is that the people would know the truth from you because in all honesty, they actually feel it from current rumours.

[*Achilles, the military leader enters*]

Achilles : My queen, I've carried out all your orders. Yes madam. After we prepared the fleet we put it on wooden carriages pulled by donkeys, mules and camels across the desert until we reached Hieonopolis on the sea coast which seperates us from the lands of the Arabs and Jews. There the fleet stands fully ready to receive your orders to sail easterwards. But something totallly unexpected happened. I've come on the double at full speed to inform you of what

happened and receive your new orders.

Cleopatra : Undoubtedly, you bear disturbing news, catastrophes don't come single but in bands. What happened ?

Achilles : The king of the Arabs Malek has allied with the Jewish king Herod – this is an unusual matter ! For the first time the two ally together and for what end ? To annul your designs and the movement of our fleet. They are afraid, as it seems, that we'll found a strong kingdom in the East adjacent to their lands, and thus would be of deadly danger to them. They've mobilized all their troops and fleets to prepare to attack us. Now we can't sail in the Red Sea unless we're ready to launch a war against them.

Cleopatra : [*Bending her head*]

Pothinius : My queen, the situation doesn't call for delay. We've been always accustomed to your firmness and deciseveness. Now we're in dire, urgent need for your strong will, usual courage and your initiative in taking historic decisions.

Achilles : As for me, my queen I'm at your beck and call, our fleet in the East is ready to engage in the war.

[*A messenger enters*]

The Messenger [*Bending*] : My lady, queen of Egypt and the East, do you permit me to disclose the news in the presence of your men ?

Cleopatra [*Nodding her head*] : Yes – say what you have. Hurry !

The Messenger : Our spies in Greece were able to collect information concerning our Roman enemy, they all point that Octavius is intent on heading directly with his fleet to Alexandria, which most likely he'll reach within a few days.

Cleopatra [*Standing quickly*] : Go now, and don't return again unless you have precise and accurate information about the advancing Roman troops, their numbers and equipment, everything concerning them.

[*The messenger bows his head and retreats*]

Pothinius : What will your majesty do ?

Cleopatra [*Ignoring the question*] : Achilles, return with your army and fleet to Alexandria and mobilize all ground and naval troops that you can in the city [*speaking to Pothinius*] I've never considered fleeing Egypt. How could I ever flee my homeland, my country which embraces in its soil the remains of my ancestors ? How could I flee the kingdom of

my children ? Egypt is my family's past and the future life of my children. I've assembled troops around the bay and deliberalty acted as though I were skirmishing with both Arabs and Jews. Moreover, I devised a plan by which news of these skirmishes would reach Octavius. It's a manoeuvre which I meant to mislead the enemy. There's no doubt that he has his spies keeping us under their eyes. In all cases we'll surprise the Romans by our armies and fleets in Alexandria to confront them [*Achilles bows his head and exits*] As for the people and their misgivings, Pothinius, I'll go myself to the temple of the sacred Isis and hold her feasts and deliver speeches to the people to disclose to them the truth of the situatioin to them. Now you may go to supervise all preparations for these festivties.

[*Pothinius exits*]

Charmian : Your Majesty, I think that you should rest a while then put on all your make up and from hence go to Antonius to discuss matters.

Irene : Oh lady ! how *I do* hate war, it so detracts from your beauty which only glimmers in peace time.

Cleopatra : Who on earth loves war and hates peace ! Whoever tasted war, Irene, will not help but

adore peace ? But Rome is such an aggressive, belligrent state which does not desire peace for me, for Egypt or for Antonius. It's the enemy of love, Irene, as well as of beauty too.

Charmian : Hurry up then to go to Antonius your ally and love to set him free from his seclusion.

Cleopatra : No, not yet Charmian. I still have a hard task awaiting me I've got to go on a long trip before I go to him.

Scene IV

[The palace of the Arab king Malek who sits on the throne surrounded by Arab sheikhs. Cleopatra enters]

Malek : Hail and a hearty welcome to you Arab sister. Such is our custom that all our guests become kin to us. Egypt is so special to us. It's our great sister, the cradle of all civilizations in our region, and hence the queen of Egypt is special to us in our country. Our love and respect for her make us is keen on seeing her all the time.

Cleopatra : Thank you for such a generous hospitality, King of Arabs.

Malek : No need to thank me. It's a sign of good hospitality to be honest and out spoken with you, Arab sister.

Cleopatra : I do appreciate honesty.

Malek : People have their reservations concerning your descent from foreign blood. They call you The Macedonian, and say that it's on account of that that you are inclined towards foreigners and support them against the indigeneous natives of the region. My countrymen have grumbled a lot about the skirmishes which have lately taken place in the demarcation boundaries between us.

Cleopatra : No, Arab King. I need not attest my Egyptian identity, my affiliation and belongingness to this region. I will merely remind you of some essential, rudimentary facts on top of which is that affiliation to a certain nationality is not by necessity based on ethnic principles. It's rather cultural affinity which unites different peoples in languages, common sentiments and sometimes religious beliefs. Nationalism is thus the common heritage as well as the future of thousands of year to come. As for those who doubt and question my Egyptian identity, they are falsifying facts because they overlook the fact that my ancestors lived in Egypt for the last three centuries. Egypt is a cultural crucible which melts and integrates foreigners breathing on its soil, if they live only for one generation in it, thanks to the water of the River Nile that they drink, and thanks to the scorching heat of the burning, bright sun which tans the complexion with a bronze colour which becomes very similar to the darkish colour of the fertile silt of the Nile. As for the skirmishes, they were deliberate and intenational on my part. They were merely a manoeuvre to deceive the Romans who are about to invade my beloved, cherished Egypt. King of the Arabs, I cherish no hopes in your country for whoever owns Egypt can never

covet nor desire another country. It is a country which welcomes with open arms and heart every new comer while its natives never wish to depart from it to other countries. Have'nt you ever noticed the Nile flowing from the south stretching in all nobility, its generous arms northwards to the delta, welcoming all its lovers who approach him from all directions ? Have you ever heard throughout history that Egypt has invaded foreign lands, or that it has expansive ambitions ? No, King of Arabs, Egypt has always been the victim. Whoever wanted to colonize and lay hands on the area starts with Egypt, he may find it sufficient, or he may extend his ambitious to its neighbours. For this reason I've come to you Arab king. Our country and yours are threatened.

Malek : It's for this reason I've called all heads of the tribes, my Arab brothers to this assembly to listen to your story and discuss the situation with them.

Cleopatra [*Addressing the sheikhs*] : I ask you to support and uphold Egypt. I haven't come seeking your money nor gold from your mines, for Egypt's treasury is overladden with gold and money. But your is support in your capacity as neighbours and partners in destiny will raise the morales of our soldiers and unite us in the

face of the enemy and consolidate us in hardships and aspirations. What I'm now offering you is a treaty of alliance and joint defence.

Malek [*Addressing the sheikhs*] : And now - what's your opinion heads of tribes ? I seek no counsel except yours and your opinion is the binding word of law.

1st Sheikh : Agreed – I consider the aggression on Egypt an aggression on all Arab tribes.

2nd Sheikh : I object. I denounce the stance of Egypt as well as that of the Egyptian queen, I refuse and object to what she has said, or will say in the future.

3rd Sheikh : As for me, I wholly believe in the golden mean – I thus neither agree nor object

Malek : Neither agree nor object ?

3rd Sheikh [*Looking at Cleopatra admiring her beauty*] **:** Yes this matter needs study ... [*approaching her*] and negotiations ... and talks.

Malek : Well then, let me discuss with the two sheiks who have conflicting views,in the hope of striking a balance between them while you negotiate with Cleopatra. Discuss the situation in details with her and don't leave her until you reach a satisfactory definite, opinion.

[Cleopatra and the sheikh go to the side of the stage while Malek and the two other sheiks go to the other corner.]

Cleopatra : What's your name sheikh ?

Sheikh 3 : Salek

Sheikh 2 : Listen Malek I object to an agreement with this licentious queen.

1st Sheikh : Soft, soft sheikh – our fathers advised us to use our neighbours kindly.

Cleopatra : Listen to me Salek, Cleopatra the seventh, descendant of the Ptolemies and queen of Egypt, is talking to you, and appreciates your careful deliberation.

Malek : O sheikh, I'm personally very hesitant and I dread this queen.There is charm and fascination in her character which frighten me.

Salek : As for me, I love Egypt and its queen and I appreciate your daring audacious character, I even like your way of life.

2nd Sheikh : This whore who fell in love with three famous men and brought shame and disgrace on our heads, as her neighbours, we are Arabs we don't accept disgrace and infamy.

1st Sheikh : Be decent. Don't slander married women lest you unjustly accuse people.

Cleopatra : What do you mean Salek ?

Salek : Your love for life. *Joie de vivre !*

Malek : Well sheikh, at present this queen's past does not concern us, but we rather have to discuss the status quo, Egypt is threatened, and the queen is offering us an alliance, to put it bluntly she's calling for help.

Cleopatra : I don't deny my love for life and pleasures, but now Salek, I'm wholly preoccupied with the danger that threatens my country. Nothing save this engages my thoughts.

Salek : At present I'm absolutely at the helm as far as Arab conditions are concerned. As you can see there is a sheikh who consents and another one who dissents, and my voice will outweigh either scale of the balance.The king will abide by the view which I'll support.

Cleopatra : I detect magnanimty and chivalry in you.

2nd Sheikh : How can we forget the past of this licentious queen ? It was precisely this that led to the present situation bulging with problems and threats ?

1st Sheikh : May the gods forgive her for her past conduct.

Salek : I have only one thing to ask.

Cleopatra : Say, what is it ?

Salek : To possess in Egypt, that is in Alexandria, a palace next to yours.

Cleopatra : Egypt is open to all Arabs, you are granted what you wish.

2nd Sheikh : This serpent has come to spread her poison here.

1st Sheikh : Don't be unjust, she's in a predicament, she's seeking our help.

Malek : True, we ought not forget that we're Arabs and we've always been known to help the distressed, and consequently we've been called The Rescuers.

Salek : I'm afraid you haven't got my hint, I mean that you become mine.

Cleopatra : I belong to my husband and father of my children.

Salek : Kick him out - this Antonius, he's a foreigner - he's defeated and consequently he poses no danger.

Cleopatra : He *was* a foreigner before he married me, and before I bore him his children. Egypt does not desert and leave in the lurch her defeated lovers, either in war or love.

Salek : How amazing ! Do you insist on your devotion to him.

Cleopatra : I'll either live or die with him, conquered or conquerors.

Salek [*Leaves her rushing towards the king and the two sheikhs*] : O Arabs, upholders of glory and integrity ! After consideration and deliberation I hereby declare my verdict to you : It is a disgrace if you support Cleopatra or even welcome, host, or accomodate her on your sacred land she's the depraved, immoral, licentious serpent of the Nile. Her mere presence here poses a threat to you. If she's defeated while we're in alliance with her, if she conquers with our help, she'll overpower us. Kick out this whore, set yourself free from this catastrophic calamity.

[*Cleopatra weeps while she leaves the stage – Curtain*]

Scene V

[*King Herod sits in the state Hall wearing King David's crown decorated with a six-sided star. His men and counsellors standing around him. It is midnight or immediately after.*]

Herod [*Absent minded and pensive*] **:** What does Fate hide from us ? O God ? How can we get rid of this calamity [*Gets up and paces in the hall*]. My fate, as well as that of my kingdom are suspended by my conduct tonight, yes tonight. The region is teeming with infinite upheaval, danger and threats encircle us from all directions. Wars have exhausted all nations save that of Jehovah. I managed to bring my nation to safety so far from getting involved in the hubbub of civil wars betwixt Roman leaders – But tonight, danger has come knocking at my door – As it looks, my kingdom and I won't escape the danger which settled in the East. But where's the minister I sent for ? why is he tardy ?

[*Minister enters rubbimg his eyes*]

Minister : Good Evening, or rather good morning, your majesty [*yawning*]. Haven't you slept your majesty till this late hour of night ? What's amiss your majesty ? I've come the moment I received your majesty's orders.

Herod : I seek your good counsel minister. I'm sleepless and can't rest. Hard has been the clampdown of evil on us tonight.

Minister : I'm your obedient servant your majesty [*yawning*] I too am depressed, our position is difficult and laden with danger. We've seen past crises and teribbly suffocating times. Sometimes we even had to give up some money which, in fact, was ours. They levied taxes on us which we were forced to pay. They increased the cost of goods which we import from them and we accepted the raise against our will. They borrowed money from us, we lend them by a meagre, poor rate which exceeds not twenty percent - we've given both warring parties - what else do they ask for ?

Herod : You're raving. You haven't grasped what I'm talking to you about. This time the matter is not concerned with money. It's a matter of life or death.

Minsiter : What are you talking about ? Haven't asked for either money – or land ? Well, well – Everything is all right then! (*yawning*).

Herod : I wish you'd wake up and listen attentively to me – Observe well minister, the enchantress, that queen of Egypt, has come to visit us secretly tonight and has been escorted by

nobody except her ladies in waiting. She requested me to live in one of my palaces on the outskirts of the town, to avoid the curiosity of the onlookers.

Minister [*Interrupting*] **:** O calamity ! This queen is defiled and devilish. Her visit here is a sign of ill omen. May god protect us from her evil !

Herod : After I accomodated her in the palace she asked for, her messenger came here now saying that she requests my instant presence.

Minister [*Astonished*] **:** Instant ! At such an hour ! Instant !! How shocking ! Why such a hurry ?! This queen's like calamaties which know not the appropriate time for visits, they befall people whenever they like.

Herod : You haven't grasped nay meaning yet! she's come to pay us a friendly visit and said that she's forgotten all the old animosity between us. She asserted that she believes that the traditionl state of belligrency between our countries is due to psychological reasons and old accumulations of mutual misunderstanding.Hence she decided to pay us a visit in person totally and absolutely unescorted by her guards in order to eliminate all these misgivings and doubts and destroy this psychological barrier betwixt our

kingdoms. She justified her keenness on having the visit kept a secret that the situation is extremely embarrasing for she cannot justify the visit to Antonius nor to her Arab neighbours. Moreover, she can't openly announce this visit to the Egyptian people because they bear us an old hatred. Moreover, they are preoccupied with their defeat in Actium. She said that both Arabs and Egyptians will regard this visit a betrayal to them and repeatedly requested that this matter be kept a secret betwixt us.

Minister : How strange! How bizzare ! To leave all that's going on in her country and to come here to eliminate the psychological animosity between our kingdoms! How extraordinary! This is an eccentric queen!She leaves her defeated country while its wounds are still aching to visit us! I can't understand anything!

Herod [*Twisting his moustache and walking arrogantly*] **:** I have to explain to you an important aspect in the situation. She's hinted to me that she's now bored of Antonius' company, nay that this latter has deserted her to live in a remote palace in Alexandria, isolating himself from his friends and comrades. It was even said that he intended to commit suicide. Cleopatra, is first and

foremost, a woman. D'you understand?

Minister : But your highness, what bussines is that of mine ?!

Herod [*Furiously*] : What bussines of yours ? Why then did I send for you ? I'm asking your advice – Shall I go to her or not ?

Minister : If I rightly understand the aim of this nocturnal visit as you yourself explained, then the matter rests in your hands - what should I say ? It seems that the afflictions and disasters as well as the repercussions of the defeat have exhausted and worn out this beautiful queen's nerves. They have preoccupied all Egyptian men, so Cleopatra hasn't found what satisfies her need over there, and has come to our country seeking your majesty's help. You are a gallant chivalrous young man in affairs of war as well as battles of love.

Herod : Are you makimg fun of me, minister ?

Minister : God forbid, your majesty! Matters are so clear, they need neither interpretation nor explanation - a beauttiful, down trodden defeated queen, whose lover deserted her has come to spend the time over here at our palace, why don't you visit her and raise her morale ?

Herod [*Laughing*] **:** You're such a simpleton !

Minister : In all honesty, your majesty, I'd rather be a simpleton in such delicate situations. These are strictly personal matters have nothing to do with political or economic affairs of the country.

Herod : You then agree that I'd go to the beautiful queen who's waiting for me and throw myself in her embrace.

Minister [*Whispering*] : God forbid! [*Raising his voice*]. All right, all right then, your majesty - is that's what you're determined on doing which will heal the poor queen's wounds ?

Herod : You're a cowardly hypocrite! If the matter were that simple, I wouldn't ask for your advice – It's true that I'll go to her, not to throw myself in her embrace nor taste her sweet kisses, but to kill her, yes and this is how I'll kill her.

[*Waving the sword in the minister's face*].

Minister [*Falling to the ground in terror*] : Haven't I said that this is a calamity that has befallen us tonight – True – it's a calamity.

Herod [*Vehemently*] : Rise, coward! why should it be a calamity if I kill her, I'll kill two birds with one stone, I'll rid the victorious Octavius of that dangerous queen once and for all. Don't

you know that the Romans heartily hate her, but greatly dread her. She's an ambitious queen, she vanquished Julius Caesar's heart, the greatest Roman leader so he later took her with him to Rome, accomodated her in the city of the seven hills on the Tiber banks. Ever since that time she's been excercising enormous political influence over those in charge of running matters in Rome. Moreover, the Sepelinian prophecies vaguely referred to Cleopatra as the long – awaited for national leader, who will liberate the East from the yoke of the despicable Roman occupation. It was Cleopatra who ignited and triggered riots and civil wars betwixt the two parts of the Roman empire, she wholly attracted Antonius to her side and made him divorce Octavius' sister, his lawful wife, Octavia. Matters deterriorated between the two Roman leaders until they confronted each other in Actium. The Roman people no doubt will feel grateful to me if I rid him of this horrific evil, isn't that so ?

Minister nods his head

Herod [*Not expecting an answer*] : The other bird is Antonius' satisfaction with me. I'll rid him of this queen for good. She bewitched him, captured his soul and diverted his attention

from his military and national vocations, and now he's captivated by her love and sympathy. If I should destroy her, he'll be furious at me for some time then he'll soon forget her, and will get to know the advantages of her disappearance.

Minister : No, no, your majesty. I implore you to listen to my advice since I'm far advanced in years than you.

Herod : You're advising me to go to her as her lover not her exterminator ?

Minister : No, your majesty, absolutely not ! Don't go to her as either.

Herod : Why ? How is that so ?

Minister : Set aside this amorours affair. Cleopatra your majesty adores Antonius as much as she does life itself – she rates him higher than any other person in the entire world. She's willing to sacrifice everything in this world for his sake. She has linked between him and the dignity and freedom of her country Egypt, and thus took him as an ally and lover, then a husband and father of her children. She's fallen in the trap she set for him, and can't be liberated from it as much as he himself is unable to.Your majesty, Cleopatra and Antonius have been bound together by an eternal, unbreakable tie

and hence, your majesty I greatly doubt her shows of love to you.

Herod : Should I doubt myself and my intuition, now that she's actually proved that to me ?

Minister : If your majesty would allow me to inform you that when- ever any man sees or hears about Cleopatra, he instantly falls in love with her, even her countrymen adore her as though they were all her lovers. She, in turn, treats them with the tenderness and sympathy of lovers. She's a rare woman, your majesty. They say that her eyes use a thousand tongues and can talk dozens of languages. Such a woman poses an enormous threat to your majesty and our kingdom. You have witnessed how she entrapped many a Roman emperor. Don't make calamities befall our heads as those of Julius Caesar and Antonius, she wants to enkindle Octavius and Antonius against us at the same time. She deliberately sows the seeds of suspicion and jealousy in Antonius' heart against you and our kingdom. D'you know what'll happen if rumours spread about your amorous affair with the Egyptian queen ? Your majesty, I implore you keep away from this woman's way and guard yourself against her evil.

Herod : Then let me kill her and absolve the world from her evil.

Minister : Killing her is more dangerous than adoring her. We don't know who'll win the next battle. If Octavius is triumphant, he'll be livid at you because you killed the queen he's so eager to capture to decorate his triumphal procession in Rome. However, if Antonius wins the war, he'll be master of East and West without the slightest doubt, and will then totally eliminate our kingdom from the globe, to avenge the murder of his incomparable paramour, and thus Cleopatra will achieve by her death by our hands what she has always yearned for in her life – to exterminate and root us out.

Herod [*Annoyed*] **:** What should we do then ?

Minister : Your majesty, Flee ! I deem it necessary that you flee the country at once, now, at this very moment I'll send to the Egyptian queen to inform her that her messenger reached your palace after you'd left the country, heading in an urgent matter to Syria.

Herod [*Restlessly*] : Well, prepare yourself then to accompany me on this urgent visit.

Minister [*Stammering*] : Who ? Me ? I implore your majesty to relieve me from travelling by night on an arduous road. My heart is somehow deficient and I need some rest [*The king leaves, followed by the minister whispering*] and besides, I wish to see that charming queen!

Scene VI

[*The same setting as in scene one*]

Cleopatra [*Taking off her historical attire and becomes once more an ordinary character in modern clothes such as a blouse and trousers*] : No, no, gentlemen. We must cancel this Jewish scene, it's wholly ungrounded, and what's more it's absolutely ridiculous.

Director : But that's what we found in history books [*looking to the dramatist*] Isn't that so ? Speak up.

Dramatist [*Stammering*] **:** em – em ...

Cleopatra : History books are packed with lies. I've never visited the Jewish king nor have I ever seen him. It's an invented story by which Herod wanted to blemish and defame the reputation of the Egyptian ruler. Had I been a mere seeker of physical sensual pleasures, I'd have chosen the most handsome and strongest either of my generals or the Romans, and devoted both myself and energy to the pursuit of these filthy pleasures. If these practices were permissable for me in my reckless green years, they are no longer becoming to a wife and mother like myself, a queen who loves her family and country. I adore, my husband

Antonius, who did not care a damn for the whole world in exchange for settling in Egypt.

Director : Your words are absolutely convincing, Cleopatra – Moreover, your encounter with the Jewish king was mentioned only in Jewish references. However, it's part of history which cannot be deleted. Isn't that so, dramatist ? Speak up - don't be so tongue – tied.

Cleopatra : I'm absolutely adamant about it. I dictated my proviso prior to my taking part in this play that I have the right to interfere – we must omit that silly Jewish scene from our play.

Dramatist : Well then, let's omit together with it that Arab scene of your encounter with the Arab king Malek, and his brother Salek and the rest of tribes chieftains - what do you say ?

Cleopatra : But my encounter with the Arabs is a historical one supported by solid documents and references. No one can dare deny it.

Dramatist : D'you believe so ? You're deluded Cleopatra, they've rejected you and turned their backs on you.

Cleopatra : It's you and your likes who're deluded. As for me, I know exactly where I stand. I fully believe that temporary attitudes are doomed to vanish and what remains is the essence – what

remain are the unchangeable facts of history. I'm mistress of my fate, maker of my history I thus insist on ommitting the Jewish scene and keeping the Arab one.

Spectator I [*From the auditorium*] **:** What we're watching is a bizarre, weird matter [*addresing the actors on stage*] I don't understand whether you're performing a play, or have you imagined yourselves real historical figures ? Don't waste our time.

Spectator II : Instead of quarrelling over side issues and whether this or that is true or fake, proceed on with your work until the play is over.

Spectator I : Don't impose yourself trustee on us. Allow us the freedom of thinking, the privilege of judgement to conclude what's true and what's false. We're not youngsters, gentlemen and we're not that naive as you may imagine.

Spectator II : Don't omit either the Arab or even the Jewish scene. Leave us to compare between them and conclude what's more true and lasting.

Director : That's a reasonable solution. In my capacity as director, I can't object to the opinion of the audience in the auditoriun, to me they're like the people in a democratic system ! They have the final say.

Dramatist : Well, Well.

Cleopatra [*Putting on her historical garments once more*] : I'll then resume my role [*adderssing the audience*] : Wholly confident in the soundness of your judgement my dear people, I'm absolutely certain that in the long run you'll dwell on the right choice, possessors of the ancient civilization.

[*Curtain*]

ACT II

Scene I

[Timonion's palace on the premonitory in the sea isolated from the city of Alexandria. The palace is surrounded by forests of trees and palm trees. Antonius, (in Enobarbus and Eros' presence) sits on a couch in a big balcony. He is leaning his head on the palm of his hand. He sits meditating, absent – mindedly gazing at the sea.]

Enobarbus : Sir! ... time flees very quickly, allow me to intrude upon your solitude to inform you about a grave matter.

Antonius [Silent as though he has heard nothing].

Eros [*Addressing Enobarbus*] **:** Spare him now Enobarbus, for the hour of stillness and relaxation for people of agility and stamina is a positive asset for them. It renews their activity and relaxes their nerves. My master Antonius, the valiant hero is in need of rest for a few days, nay for months and years after ....

Enobarbus [*Interrupting to whisper to Eros*] : After the defeat ... is that what you mean ?

Eros [*Resuming his speech*] : And why the hurry ? ... [*whispering to Enobarbus*] Isn't every thing over ? D'you think you can make him budge

when Cleopatra herself has failed in doing so ? [*as though talking to himself*] In truth I wonder how can both bear to part from each other for such a long time!

Enobarbus [*Ignoring Eros' words and talkimg to Antonius*] : My lord the emperor! .... Sir! [*Antonius looks at him so he lowers his voice*] Sir, my one desire is to share with you your meditation that has so deeply engulfed you. [*after a while*] Unless you consider it inapprorpriate now to break to you such news. True, it's unhappy news, but we should deal with it one way or another and we may even avoid its terrible repercussion with our discretion and agility.

Antonius [*Nonchalantly*] **:** Out with what you have, things cannot possibly be worse, say it then, speak up.

Enobarbus : Sir, rumours have it that our ground leader in Actium, Canidius has taken the scattered remanants of our army and joined our enemy Octavius. The rest of our military forces in Greece has dispersed, having lost leadership and and failing to find one to unite their forces and reorganize their ranks. Some have joined the enemy, while the others returned to their native homelands. Some others have settled in Greece preferring to live in foreign lands rather

than to return defeated to their homeland.

Antonius [*Whispering as though talking to himself*] **:** I wish I'd done like those wise men ... How I yearn to give up all responsibilities and burdens, to live like an ordinary citizen, free of all obligations and shackles.

Enobarbus : What is it that my master says ?

Antonius : ... Nothing ... carry on with your words ... What happened next ?

Enobarbus : The Asian kings have started to ally with the enemy, the first was Amintas king of Galatia, followed by kings of Kilikia, Kabadokia, Baflagonis. As for the Arab king Malek and the Jewish king Herod, they have not declared openly their stance but we strongly suspect their intentions, especially that wily Jewish king. This is the situation, master of the East.

Antonius : Do you still believe I'm master of the East ? Where is that East ?

Enobarbus : What I'm saying your majesty, and I do mean what I say, you're still master of Egypt, and Egypt is the gem of the East, its tiny states are the beads of its necklace, it's the gem of all gems. Whoever conquers it, controls the whole region and puts the whole region under his sway. It's the entrance of the East and the

maker and unmaker of fates of the whole region. Egypt cannot be excluded in matters of war or peace in the region. Its queen has signed a valid treaty with us, thus our interests have become common, our fates have united. Egypt has become our beloved country and ally, our refuge and shelter. Where should we go if we depart from Egypt, or if Egypt deserts us ? Lord Antonius, hasten to Cleopatra, make sure that this precious gem doesn't slip through your fingers.

Antonius : Is't really you Enobarbus who's saying that! Whatever happened ? you're now saying that ? How often did you staunchly object to her staying with us in Actium, demanding her instant return to Egypt before the start of the battle ?

Enobarbus : My lord, that's a different matter. I objected to her presence in Actium, I still believe that she caused our defeat one way or another, for hadn't she fled from the battlefield, events wouldn't have taken that turn. But now we're in a totally different situation. Don't forget, we're now standing on Egyptian soil, we've got to win the Egyptians to our side and gain their confidence. They love their queen dearly, nay you can rarely find a people who bear their ruler such adoration like the

Egyptian people have for their queen, and hence we can't sever our relationships with this queen if we wish Egypt to be the cradle of our hopes, and aid us in our war, and don't forget she's your wife and beloved.

Antonius : But you haven't heard, eloquent solicitor on Cleopatra's behalf, what has this treacherous queen done lately.

Enobarbus : What has she done, my lord ?

Antonius : Confirmed news has reached me that she travelled to meet Herod, the king of the Jews, by night and without informing anybody. Herod himself has sent informing me about it. He said when he doubted her intentions he avoided her and held no meetings with her to preserve the friendly relationship between us both. This caused him to travel the same night of her arrival to his country to pay a visit to his friend the Syrian king without prior plans or appropriate prepraations. The king of the Jews has borne such trouble to preserve our relationship, while Cleopatra wanders here and there, secretly, and by night and we're the last to know!

Enobarbus : You were the one who prevented any of her messengers to come close to your palace gates here. Moreover, I can't bring myself to believe

such Jewish news. Mighty leader, don't forget that Cleopatra whom we've granted the right of exploiting the balsam fields found in the Jewish kingdom itself, has become Herod's deadly foe and dangerous competitor. Thus it stands against reason that Cleopatra, the self–confident queen would relinquish her pride and dignity and would go all by herself to visit the king of Jews, who is definitely inferior in status than her, and would benefit from causing misunderstanding, discord and mistrust between you and Cleopatra. I'm certain that the Arab king Malek burnt Cleopatra's ships which swarm in the Red Sea bay, but I'm dead positive that such a thing happened on the insinuation made by the sneaky Jewish king. There are ties between the two kings which Herod has exploited, and thus put the kind– hearted Arab king in such a fix by involving him in such an operation aiming to spoil the relationship between the Egyptian queen and her Arab neighbours. Now he's trying to sow the seeds of suspicioin in your heart towards your ally and wife. The king of Jews desires to punish the defeated Cleopatra, and we have to obstruct his path. Emperor, abandon your seclusion, and go to Cleopatra's palace, draw a joint plan to confront your common enemy who beseiges you from all

sides before Octavius takes us by surprise. It's been our fault to be lax we have'nt resisted him properly and left him to land on shore and set his camps on the outskirts of Alexandria.

Antonius : No, Enobarbus. If you wish to fight, do so. But as for me, I'll stay here. I won't budge until I die in my place. What's the use of battles and warfare ? I've gone through devastating wars ever since my early, green days and what have I gained ? Here is my friend and comrade in many battles, my partner in government Octavius waging war against me, and without any consideration for my old age he mocks and satirizes me. Here I stand, after a lifetime of fighting, I have now lost a kingdom and deserted by kings. What's more I lost my private domestic life, and live like a banished man in Egypt. It's true that I love Cleopatra but she tampers with me, double-crosses me, because she's taken full sway and possession of my heart and soul, but what can beauty do to a defeated leader ? Begone Enobarbus, away Enobarbus and leave me alone [*Enobarbus exits as Eros approaches Antonius who is not aware of his arrival*] yes, for I'm now — nothing but a neglected debris — a worthless junk — after all living things and creatures took their commands from me, and

were petrified by my wrath. If I wished to demolish a city, I did it instantly, if I confronted a warrior, I defeated him, if I went into a rage, my wrath shook kingdoms and crowns toppled down. If I rejoiced, the whole world danced to my tunes – But now, I'm withering, verging my decline, for after a short while the end comes, and what a terrible end! Young Octavius will set his claws on me, tear me up mercilessly and trample me under his feet if he chooses to, for he has the power and the means, and his lucky star is shinning bright – but I won't give him that golden chance. Never will he arrest Antonius alive, where's Eros ? [*Calling aloud*] Eros, Eros.

Eros : Master, I'm always at your beck and call.

Antonius : You've always been loyal to me.

Eros : If the world were to realize your pure spirit and infinite nobility, it would come on its bended knees wooing your favour, and be honoured by serving you.

Antonius : Well, I only ask of you one simple matter.

Eros : Command master, and I'll carry out all your commands.

Antonius : Give me your right hand then.

Eros : My right hand ? My right hand sir ? To shake

hands with the emperor is an honour I don't deserve.

Antonius : Well, give me your right hand [*He actually takes his right hand*] swear Eros, I mean repeat after me this oath which I'll dictate you [*Eros repeats after him*] I swear by Jupiter the supreme god, the faithful guardian of executing the most soelmn oaths, the torturer to perjurors of their oaths I swear to kill my master Antonius with this sword [*pointing to his sword*] when he himself orders me that and in the most urgent need.

Eros [*Drawing back his hand angrily and sadly*] **:** You've stabbed me fatally in the heart beyond all cure by sowing the seeds of despair in my soul. Never will I taste hence-forward hope and joy. All what I desired of the supreme god Jupiter, and from the godesses of Fate is to cut the string of my life before the day comes when I carry out this ominous oath you've committed me to against my will.

[*A messenger enters*]

Messenger : I beg forgiveness, master Emperor. Forbear to listen to what I have to say for it's too grave a matter it cannot be overlooked, and too serious that I can't bear to keep my silence.

Antonius : Say what you've got in one full swoop.

Messenger : I will, my lord – All what I've got in a few, very direct words. I beg beforehand to be forgiven if words fail me or offend you. It may occur to you that I deliberately offend you, or those whom you love. But it's my duty which urges me not to conceal anything.

Antonius : Out with it and don't torture me with these preambles.

Messenger : Mighty sir, Cleopatra has gone to Octavius' camp, thus the rumours in all Alexandria have carried this piece of news, I followed them from one street to another, from one lane to another, nay, from one house to another, until I found the original source of the news, I arrested the man who was said to have seen Cleopatra while she was heading to Octavius' camp on the outskirts of Alexandria, then followed her unnoticed and from a short distance he was able to see her throwing herself into his embrace.

Antonius : Where's that man ?

Messenger : The guards at your palace gates barred him out and prevented him from entering with me, under the pretext that you meet absolutely nobody except by your special permission. I tried in vain to show them the importance of his coming with me to meet you, but they were deaf to my entreaties.

Antonius [*Shouting as if stung*] : Bring this man at once [*Eros rushes out and returns holding the man*].

Antonius : Tell me man, what have you exactly seen ? Have you actually seen Cleopatra in the arms of ..., I mean while she was entering Octavius' camp ?

Man [*Silent*] ......

Antonius : Why don't you speak ? If you don't say all what you've got I'll order my men to whip you and extract the truth from your heart by force, — and violence — nay with my own two hands I'll know how to make you talk [*Holding him with his hand he violently shakes him that the head cover falls off, and discovers Cleopatra in disguise*] ... YOU!! Cleopatra! [*The man withdraws gradually*].

Cleopatra [*Laughing*] **:** Yes, it's I, I found no other way to penetrate that iron seige which you've imposed on yourself except this trick [*kisses him and pats his cheeck with her hand*] I had to see you today, come what may.

Antonius : And expose yourself to dangers ? My men have strict orders to kill whoever they suspect or attempts to tresspass my seclusion.

Cleopatra : I'd rather be dead than spend the night away from you.

Antonius : And what's so special about tonight ? Isn't it just like any other night ?

Cleopatra : Take this pure gold ring and read the inscription on it, you will then understand ...

Antonius [*Taking the ring and staring at it, he reads slowly*] **:** "Happy birthday Master of the glorious East, and Cleopatra's sole love" [*Holds her tightly to his heart, rests his head on her bosom then is silent for a while, then cheerfully shouts*] Eros ! Where are you Eros ? My men and beloved ones come hither ! Come! Set us a big banquet ... let's celebrate Cleopatra's arrival here. Fill the flasks with Egyptian wine ... and mix it with Greek wine ... Bring me the lascivious Bacchus' dancers – set up the feasts, and dance with me till daybreak.

[*The men approach, flabbergasted and overjoyed*]

Cleopatra : No, Antonius' men ... wait ... [*addressing Antonius*] Don't bother, Master of the East, you're all invited to move to Cleopatra's palace which is in wait for you, wearing its loveliest garment and gloss where you'll find what you've just asked for both for you and your men ... your birthday will be an enchanting oriental night narrated in all ages and places ...

I've left back there the Egyptian Bacchus' followers dancing to celebrate your birthday, with the wine fumes tickling their minds, they started boisterous celebrates. Let's go, hurry up with me [*laughing she looks at the messenger who brought the false news*] And now, Antonius ... won't you pardon this sincere messenger ? [*They all laugh while they leave Timonion's palace*].

Scene II

[*Outside Octavius' camp, at a distance the city of Alexandria appears ... It is almost sunset ... Octavius is walking with his prime minister Maecenas, behind them the Imperial guard carry the signs and emblems of the Roman rulera double axe, surrounded by a bunch of sticks.*]

Octavius [*As if talking to himself*] : How lovely Egypt is! How enchanting Alexandria is ! its sea and sky ... its houses, temples streets and the greenery of its fields ... How fortunate and blessed is this city which drinks from the water of the Nile, and embraces all the races of the world, a place where you hear all the languages of the world ... But, mind you Maecenas, I wished I would have come to this city in peace and not in armour. Eventually the day will come when Egypt will become a Roman state after we get rid of that debauched, lustful queen. Then, Maecenas I'll prohibt Romans from entering this city except by special permission issued by me. I dread the influence of this city on Roman citizens, as much as I'm apprehensive of their effect on it. Despite this I hope to accompany you once to pay a special visit to this town to witness with our own eyes what we've often heard with our ears, to live the Alexandrian nights whose tales are nothing less than legends.

Maecenas : Venerable Emperor, these are not legends, but tangible facts ... Alexandria is the maid of the sea, it's also the enchanting, spelndid city which combines Ancient Egyptian art with the delicate beauty of the Greek races. Here, in Alexandria you may find the skilfull physician, the learned men of religion, the ingenious philosopher and the enchanting poet, side by side with the lascivious man, and lewd prostitutes. In this city the people exchange proverbs and wise sayings as easily as they do indecent jokes and lewd jests. This city has combined all contradictions and is abundant with all enchanting, breath-taking things. It is the sole queen of all refinement and was crowned the flower of all cities and ports for the past 300 years. As for its queen Cleopatra, she has combined in her character all those Alexandrian aspects. How I wish I would only set eyes on her to one glimpse of her.

Octavius : A glimpse! Even you Maecenas seek to have an intimate liasion with Cleopatra ? Where is your Roman code of values ? Where is the restraint well known in our race ? Nay, where is Maecenas our man of literature and culture ?

Maecenas : Master Emperor ... Even Cicero himself when he saw Cleopatra could not resist her bewitching temptation, for he came up with

the excuse of his need to borrow some books from her library, and persisted on visiting her. It seems that she did not treat him pleasantly, for he started to attack her, and if one studies his speeches thoroughly he'd discover that what he had done was caused only by his failure to win her love and friendship. As for Roman values, my master Emperor observe them as much as you do. But may I have the liberty, while we're quite alone here to whisper in your ears that these values are in a state of deterrioration. Do you believe your majesty that you could possibly restore or recapture the stoicism, solidarity and righteousness of the ancient Roman society ? This is an unattainable dream, valiant Emperor, the easy luxurious Greek mode of life has invaded us, and vanquished us with its concepts, even though we've vanquished the whole world by our arms and valour. Master Emperor, I wish you'd give up the idea of restoring the glory of ancient history which has become like imaginary legends, for there's no returning back. One visit to the villas constructed by the Romans in Comay and Naples, nay, even in Austia itself would be sufficient to inform you of the luxury, femininity and deterrioration that struck Roman life.

Octavius : Do you think I'm blind to all that ? But Maceanas, I'm the soveregn of the Roman Empire and I promised the Roman people to restore the right mode of behaviour and to reconstruct the ancient Roman Republic. I have to adhere tightly to traditions and respect ancient Roman values, inspite of being like you, aware of the difficulty of attaining this. We're on the threshold of a new era characterized by the total disregard to all moral values, it's the age of plunging into life and enjoying all its pleasures.

Maecenas : This is true, master Emperor. It's not logical to adopt these days the values and morals of Romulus' age or even Cato the Censor. Our youths have travelled with our armies to all parts of the civilized world, witnessed all aspects of luxury especially in the countries of the Orient and immersed in this sensual exotic life. Is it possible that when they return to Italy, they'd go back to their old, strict reserved mode of life they used to live before, and adopt the rules of propriety and decorum ?

Octavius : Do I then conclude that the Roman military conquests which brought Rome glory and grandeur have turned into a curse and plague which brought about deterrioration and decay? That relaxation and lethargy have come after

the prosperity which resulted from such conquests ? This is all true Meacenas ... your interpretation is both feasible and unimpeachable, but responsibility befalls the leaders of the nation. They have to be a model and exemplar to be looked up to and imitated. They've got to resist the tide of deterrioration. This is precisely what drives me mad when I think of Antonius' attitude – he's a renowned, glorious military leader, achieved many victories for Rome, he's an experienced mature man, sophisticated and shrewd he's no longer in his green years, and yet he committed what could not be forgiven for if done by youths.

Maecenas : My lord, the tide of oriental life is overwhelming and his stay in Alexandria all that long time is capable of sweeping him to that course till its very end.

Octavius : I'm not objecting to his personal life Maecenas, let him do what he will. In his early green days he did much more than he's doing now – and yet I shared with him in matters of warfare and government because he was the ablest, most efficient Roman leader. But his present behaviour in such conditions exceeds the limits of personal behaviour. He's my partner in ruling the Roman Empire whose Eastern part is subject to the rule of a licentious woman and

is guided by her commands, one who aspires and craves seizing and dominating Rome itself.

[*Enter a messenger with a Soothsayer*]

Messenger : My lord, most reverend Emperor Octavius, I've fetched you the soothsayer you asked for. She's a rare preistess we brought her along with us during our invasion of Kililia. She was Apollo's priestess in Asia, but she keeps in her store all books of prophecies and soothsayimg including the Sepellinian books.

Octavius : What language does this soothsayer talk ?

Messenger : All languages of the globe.

Maecenas : What has she said ?

Messenger : Here she is to inform you of what you will.

Soothsayer [*Holding the sceptre of knowledge, she stamps the ground with her feet, moves her head every now and then, staring at objects, human beings and sky all alike, She talks in a weird tone, raising her voice at times and lowering it at other times*] : Why have you brought me here ? I don't want to deal with human beings because they don't understand what the gods say, and it's my vocation to convey to them the messages of Heaven, but they blame me for the amibguity of the messages they get. If

these prophecies bear ill–omen to them, then woe betide me!

Maecenas [*Relaxed*] : Don't worry, sacred priestess.

Octavius : We are pious people who venerate the gods, we fully understand that the priest is not to blame when he utters by his tongue what Heaven wishes to convey. Say all that you have, and don't hesitate.

Priestess : Don't interrupt then while I say all that's in my store. Then I will immediately be gone to my natural habitat – to gods' temple.

Octavius and Maecenas [*Together*] **:** Well then – we're listening to you.

Priestess [*Constantly staring at the sky*] : I've heard the earth, sky, mountains, seas, the forests full with tears, the river banks, all reverberating one saying – agreed upon by Apollo, the greet god of propheceis in Delphi, and the Egyptian god Amun Ra in Heliopolis. When I consulted the Sepillinian books I found the same thing. I've been greatly amazed, I started running in the woods, wandering in the deserts, climbing the mountains and throwing myself in the seas and rivers. Wherever I go, I hear nothing but the same thing echoing here and there and its defeaning reverberation constantly increasing.

They all said "O Rome of Latin origin, you licentious beautified by colours and cosmetics, enraptured and exultant by the embraces of hundreds of lovers. On your hands you will wear shackles of slavery and bondage. All your power will be gone, your silky hair will be cut at the orders of an iron Oriental lady. That power that holds in its hand justice and enforces it, will hurl you from the top of the sky to the depths of the earth. May the gods bless men and women who will witness that age. They will be like simple peasants who've never witnessed the grandeur of courtly life, they'll be flabbergasted when they set eyes on such treasures. This is on account of one true system, and one just law will descend from the starry world and with them will come also to dwell with the humans the thing that they've always aspired and preferred to any thing else, — harmony, concord, solid and acceptable peace, as well as love and fraternity among the entire human race. Poverty will vanish. On that day, all feelings of envy, wrath, jealousy and foolishness will vanish, together with devastating wars, conflicts, robberies and all sorts of destructions and evils.

[*She falls in a trance to the ground raving deliriously and inarticulately, she is carried out by the messenger*].

Octavius : How strange the heavens are! These ill-omens are conveyed to us by this blasted soothsayer to scare us, the victorious, so that we would'nt rejoice in our triumphs ! As for life in the vanquished, beseiged Alexandira – well – it's normal as reported by news.

Maecenas : My lord, the Emperor, we've overcome Alexandria and its rulers, in one imminent decisive battle. It's thus advisable not to occupy your mind with what this demented soothsayer has just said. I wonder like you my lord at her words, nay a shiver whose nature nor cause I know not of flows in me and overtakes me. But now only do I understand what people since olden times have said about Egypt – that it's the cradle of witchcraft. It thus stands to reason that Egyptian witchcraft has infected this soothsayer and made her utter what she's just said. I do believe even that cunning Egyptain queen herself is behind this soothsayer and made her utter such weird, bizarre prophecies to arouse choas among our soldiers, and to enkindle the flame of enthusiasm and resistance among her people. My lord the emperor, let's drop the whole issue and focus on what we're about to do.

Octavius [*Absend–mindedly*] : I'm utterly grieved, Maecenas because I witness in Antonius'

collapse the setting of the glorious sun of Rome.

Meacenas : But my lord, you haven't granted his petitions and his condition has deterriorated. This induced him to send you his messengers requesting that he would be granted the life of an ordinary citizen in Egypt or elsewhere. But you dismissed the messengers and refused to negotiate with him over anything.

Octavius : I wish I could forgive him ! In his heart of hearts he's a benign man, with a touch of the poet in him. But now Maecenas I can't undo what I've done and said after all the battles in which we lost thousands of lives and after we prepared the Roman people psychologically for a final battle to eliminate him and his ally. Now, I can do nothing except carry out my vows made to both the Roman people and the Senate.

Maecenas : What's your next step then ?

Octavius : I'll leave my soldiers to rest for a few days, during which time I'll hold a war council to discuss the seige of Alexandria, when we'll invade it and from which direction. I don't believe it will resist for long, for Antonius and Cleopatra's armies and fleets are scattered in the open sea. We've actually sent our spies to

the city and gathered the utmost information abouts its how things stand there, as well as that of its people. We even spread rumours which pave our way amidst the Alexandrians. Begone now Maecenas and inform our leader Agrippa to make prepartions to hold a council of war tomorrow.

[*Maecenas exits, while Pothinius enters dressed in Greco–Egyptian clothes, and on his sides stand two Roman guards*].

Pothinus : Greetings to the venerable Emperor of Rome – I carry them from Cleopatra, queen of Egypt.

Octavius : Well – what tidings do you bear ?

Pothinus : Not tidings Emperor of Rome, but one single request which I hope will be agreeable to you.

Octavius : Out with it.

Pothinus : The queen of Egypt is offering peace to you and only asks you your pledge that her sons would keep the throne of Egypt. It's their forefathers' ancestral throne.

Octavius : Is that all what the queen requests ?

Pothinus : Yes, venerable Roman Emperor, this is all that she requests, she awaits me most eagerly to know your reply. She'll be at your beck and call if you grant her request.

Octavius : Well, tell her for me then that I'll grant her what she requests, as well as other requests if she in her turn carries out what I desire.

Pothinus : She's most willing to carry out all your desires reverend Roman Emperor. She has assigned me to inform you so.

Octavius : Then she must either kill Antonius or banish him, and rid me and Rome of him and his evils. All that happened was on account of his stubbornness and impulsiveness.

Pothinus [*Taken aback*] : My lord, reverend Roman Emperor – dictate what terms you will except what you've just asked. It's not the nature of the Egyptian queen, nor that of the Egyptian people to betray or stab in the back his lovers in time of need. I beg you my lord to give up only this condition.

Octavius : This is absolutely impossible.

Pothinus : But my lord, reverned Roman Emperor, you're getting the queen of Egypt and the Egyptian land involved in a despicable conspiracy.

Octavius [*Interrupting angrily*] : Shut up – don't you utter a single word. You have exceeded the limits of your duty as the messenger of the Egyptian queen. Begone and inform her of what I've told you. I swear by Jupiter the

supreme god that I would have never let you return unpunished for your impudence and audacity in arguing with me, had it not been for my eagerness not to spoil the good will between Cleopatra and myself.

[*Pothinus exits frowning and shivering while Eros enters, a messenger from Antonius*].

Eros : My lord, the Emperor of the East sends his fratenal greetings to the reverned Emperor of Rome and ...

Octavius [*Supperssing his anger*] : What does your lord the Emperor of the East want ? Say what you have and be brief.

Eros : My lord, Emperor Antonius is suggesting to the venerable Roman Emperor to enter in a single duel which would settle the war betwixt you. If you win you'll reign over both East and West. If Antonius wins, you leave him to reign over the East while you take command over the west as matters stood before.

Octavius [*Bursting with in laughter*] : Ha, ha, ha. Go and tell your master that I'm Emperor of the East and West after the battle of Actium, and that there are a thousand and one ways to assert this mastery in East and West other than a single duel. He's still dreaming of the past and its

glory. No doubt the Egyptian wine has affected his mental power. Tell him that when I wish to die I have innumerable methods of achieving it. I'm in no need to expose myself to danger in a single duel against the old lion of war whose dignity was scotched by his crushing defeat at Actium. Begone and tell him that all his old and new requests are not granted. I will allow no longer into my presence any of his messengers.

[*Eros exits hurriedly*]

Scene III

[Cleopatra's palace where a lavish banquet is held. Antonius is reclining in the Roman fashion on a sofa, infront of him is a huge table on which rests different sorts of food and beverage. Facing him sits Cleopatra at another big table, surrounded by her children Caesarion, Alexander, Helios, Ptolemy Philaselphius, Cleopatra Cellini and many servants and maids who move about here and there with glasses of wine].

Antonius [*Addressing some of his men standing close to him*] : My valiant soldiers, let's celebrate and rejoice today for tomorrow toils await us. Yes tomorrow we will encounter the foe – But now let's eat and drink together until we are absolutely drunk – by Egypt's delicious wine. Come on my men, I may not eat with you again after today – who knows ? Sit by me, at my table, let's fraternize in rejoicing in the same way we support one another in war [*Antonius' men sit at his table*].

Cleopatra [*Addressing her children*] : Caesarion – pupil of my eye and my most cherished hope for Egypts prosperous future. You've become more radiant and darker my love after your inspection tour in Upper Egypt. How insightful Antonius was when he appointed you master over your brother kings. How

lovely and charming you look in your silk costume with floral embroidery. How magnificent is that bunch of tulips on your chest and that double belt decorated with blue rubies and crimson ! Even your sandals with their white bands, adorned with rosy glittering pearls make you worthy of treading thrones and kingdoms under your feet. As for you, Alexander Helios you're like a sun amidst the stars, Antonius appointed you king over Armenia Media and Parthia. O Ptolemy Philadelphias, named after my great grandfather, king of Cilicia, Syria and Phoenicia! My sole daughter Cleopatra Sellini, you sit amongst them gracefully as a moon sitting on the throne of beauty and grace why wonder, isn't she my daughter ?! O my children in whose veins you merged the ebullience of Greek blood with the dignified Roman blood, nurtured and nourished by the sacred soil of Egypt and the divine waters of the Nile, may you be the pride and glory to Egypt, may the highly esteemed Isis protect you.Come on my children, let's do homage to this goddess, protectress of our lineage and our country. Let's eat and celebrate, let's rejoice!

Antonius : Where's the wine ? Where's the wine? Come on fill the cups ... as you've never done before

... and music ... Where's the music ? Let it sound loud, clamorous, brazen.

[*Enter musicians and girls dancing*].

Cleopatra : Play us the tunes of immortal Isis.

Antonius : Nay, play us rather the dancing songs of Dionysius.

Cleopatra [*Gets up, heads towards Antonius and embraces him*] : Don't you want to listen to Isis' tune .. you licentious Dionysius of Egypt ?

Antonius [*Laughing loudly*] : O New Isis! Goddess of unique beauty, thrill me with your melodious voice, for in it I hear all cosmic music, all wine of nature, and the mystery of ancient Egypt

[*They dance to the tunes of music, they are quickly followed by others and sing the following song*] :

O mighty Osiris, rise

Embrace this licentious god

Chant with Dionysius this lay

It's feast day - it's feast day

Dionysius, god of wine and victory has come

Strew for him the flowers, bless his mighty steps

It's feast day!

Tomorrow dawns sure victory

Here comes Isis all joy exultation

Her dancing and kisses are springs of life

The Nile overflows with blessings to adorn its banks

It's feast day

Tomorrow dawns sure victory

Tomorrow wreaths will crown palm tops

Nile waves caress victory flags and suns of broad daylight

Tomorrow's victory procession

Tomorrow's the birth of dawn

O Egypt! it's time for you to rejoice and rejuvenate

Egypt thou hast glory and splendour, exult!

Tomorrow's procession of victory

Tomorrow's the birth of dawn !

Let's dance with our Isis and Antonius

O Dionysius! make them triumph over their foes

God of wine and triumph!

[*The dancing processioin gradually fades and goes out. The tables are removed and the light dims.The music, though audible, becomes fainter. A very dim light is focused on the palace gates where two guards are standing.*]

1st guard [*Shaking his dozing companion who has been standing beside one of the columns*] : Ahmus, Ahmus, attention my friend, attention I've almost lost my mind, do you hear me ?

2nd guard [*Awakening and taken aback*] : O my god Hercules! save me! save me my Hercules!

1st guard : Hercules! Are you still callling on Hercules ? I don't know how come they've appointed you a guard, when you stand dozing off, unconscious of what's going on around you. Are you still calling on Hercules ?

2nd guard : What's wrong in my calling on Hercules ? or invoke him to help me, he's the defender of the troubled.

1st guard : That was before you fell asleep but now Hercules is totally lost, Ahmus.

2nd guard : Have you drunk so much wine tonight ? [*Approaches him and scrutinizes him*] : Whatever happened to you ? Have you lost your senses ? Haven't I advised you to sleep

for a while to relax your nerves ? How strange that you're the one who's mocking my sleeping while standing ? Isn't it better than raving like you ? What harm would it do you if I slept for a while as long as our Emperor dances with our queen inside the palace, just as Dionysius danced with Isis before ?

1st guard : O Ahmus, Dionysius is also lost, lost !

2nd guard [*Jestingly*] : He's also lost ? How is he lost ? Did he vanish in thin air [*Laughs loudly*]

2nd guard [*In a tragic tone*] : After you leaned your head and dozed off against the column close to you, you and this column become one object. Your snorting became unbearable, so I left you seeking peace and quiet, contemplating the city, smelling the grilled meat flying out of the palace windows, or rather the kitchen, listening to the songs and melodious music, I was transported with joy as I've never been in my life, and danced in ecstasy as if I've drunk ancient Dionysian vintage. Sudddenly, everything stopped. I sensed a horrible, weird feeling and my hair stood on end, my teeth knocked against each other, I was shaking violently then I fainted as if in a slumber. I saw visions as if I were dreaming. Two strange men both in attire and appearance approached

me - both were extremely handsome and strong - they were arguing, and then I discoveed that they were two gods. [*The following dialogue takes place in a dream like manner*]

Hercules : Where to are you heading Dionysius ?

Dionysius : Departing from this city.....Alexandria.

Hercules : How odd ! O god of triumph and wine are you departing while they're holding celebrations in your honour, drinking toasts to your health, making triumphal processions, dancing and rejoicing, invoking you and calling upon your name ?

Dionysius : Shame on them and their celebrations! They'll regret all this! Are you making fun of me, brother Hercules ? Do you believe that this is the convenient time for all these shameless, wanton celebrations, this gaiety, and this extravagance, while the enemy is beseiging the city, ready to invade it. Is this the life of a beseiged city ? After the fall of the city they will lay the blame on us, contending that the gods who protect the city have let them down. Harken to me Hercules, for I say it in all frankness. This city is no longer worthy of my presence in it.

Hercules : But brother Dionysius, Cleopatra and Antonius are making preparations to launch a violent attack tomorrow. Duty dictates that we support them. Let's forgive them for rejoicing tonight to divert for themselves as well as for their soldiers ... and

Dionysius [*Interrupting*] : Brother Hercules! Don't fool yourself and don't be carried away by your sympathy for Antonius to the extent of human frailty. You are the prime of all men and supreme hero, the invincible god of war. You know how men win wars, and how they defend their homelands don't forget your heroic nature. Have you ever heard about a conqueror who invaded cities while he's drunk? or a defender who repelled an offensive while dancing ? Absolutely not ! for both the conqueror and the defender fight till death while they're fully conscious, he starves but remains fighting, he is thirsty yet remains fighting and dies a fighter.

Hercules : The god of joyful festivities is then annoyed with these Alexandrian celebrations ?

Dionysius : For the first time in human history I hear about festivties held in honour of defeat !!

Hercules : No, no these are festivities in preparation for battles and wars.

Dionysius : This is utterly absurd and ridiculous.

Hercules : But Cleopatra and Antonius did that before – I mean while they were preparing to launch an attack before the battle of Actium. Didn't they hold splendid, extravagant festivities in the island of Samos on their way to Actium ?

Dionysius : Then people mocked and sneered at them. People in the Western world spread the word that this is how the East prepares for war, holding celebrations of dancing and singing, and banquets replete with all sorts of food and beverage, delivering bombastie heated speeches and singing hollow songs. If these things were said about the festivities held prior to the defeat, what could they possibly say about those festivities held <u>for</u> the defeat ?! Brother Hercules – I have to flee this city.

Hercules [*Placing his hand in Dionysius*] : Take me then with you ! I'll accompany you. Do you think that I could bear staying in a defeated city ?

[*Isis suddenly appears*]

Isis : Olympian brethern, sons of Zeus the supreme god, what are you discussing ?

Dionysius and Hercules [*In one voice*] **:** We are intent to depart from this city.

Isis : Why ?

Dionysius and Hercules [*In one voice*] **:** There is no room for us in this city. We do not reside in one place with defeat – we are the gods of ecstasy, joy and triumph.

Isis : Farewell then gods of triumph ! Depart and find yourselves another victorious city.

Dionysius and Hercules : And you Isis, won't you flee Alexandria ?

Isis [*Sarcastically*] : When a person deserts his habitat, his perstige is gone. If I depart, who will then remain ? I will never depart from this place, whatever happens and until the end of time. May I drink the wine of defeat with those whom I've drunk in their company before the toasts of triunph and joy. I, Isis, am like the Nile, if it deserts the land of Egypt it is no longer a Nile, and Egypt becomes no longer Egypt. I am Egypt and Egypt is immortal till the end of time. If it is defeated today, it will be resurrected tomorrow. Farewell, Olympian gods.

1st guard [*Resuming his dream like words*] : Thus Hercules and Dionysius vanished, as for Isis she lifted her head in all dignity and pride, then disappeared inside the palace. I don't know how she entered for it seemed to me that she penetrated through solid rocks. [*Feeling*

the walls with his hands] Here, in that rocky stone, Isis resides. O Isis! goddes of constancy, fidelity and endurance, you stony rocks where is faithful Isis ? Answer and reveal our Isis ! why did you engulf her in you ? [*beating the walls with his hands and feet*] I'll break you, smash you, I'll find Isis inside you [*He is exhausted with the effort and falls to the ground weeping*].

2nd guard : Ahmus, don't get excited, relax [*after a while as if talking to himself*] I don't know if what happened calls for joy or grief, I don't even know what happened! [*Shaking his companion and shouting*] : Get up awake, let's go look for Isis.

The two guards [*In one voice while running inside the palace*] : Isis, Isis where are you goddess of fidelity and constancy ?

Scene IV

[*Cleopatra's palace where the queen welcomes king Antonius, in his military uniform on his return from a battle.*]

Cleopatra : My Hercules, tidings and signs of triumph shine on your face, from your eyes emanate the lustrous glitter of Mars, on your brow shines laurel wreaths, and your kisses taste of the joy and bliss of triumph and the pleasures of life [*she embraces him*].

Antonius [*Shaking his sword*] : We launched a strong offensive, in a one–man attack, disclosing to them our valour and fortitude. They couldn't resist us for they fled like terrified hares. They retreated to their camps at the outskirts of the city, humiliated and disgraced by their defeat. At the head of the runaways was that cowardly boy, their leader Octavius terrified by our violent attack and our valiant men. He's avoided confronting me in a single duel. He will nevertheless know that fighting him on the battle field with all my men and equipment is no less dangerous for him and his soldiers.

Cleopatra [*Embracing him again*] : O Isis! Faithful goddess of Egypt ! May you always and ever support us. O ! Mars direct my Hercules to the

right track, protect us and destroy our foe [*looking at him astonishingly*] : But what's that my love? I see spots of blood on the back of your shoulder.

Antonius : This is a slight stab, for sometimes the lion cannot avoid the cat's paw which lies at his mercy. That's excatly what one of the cowardly enemy soldiers did to me. Don't get excited, for one of your kisses will heal my wounds as well as those of my soldiers'. Oh! This is Scarus, the most valiant of our fighters, honour him by a kiss from your hand.

Cleopatra [*Extending her hand to Scarus who stands behind Antonius*] : I will also reward him by offering him the order of excellence to adorn his chest [*a servant hands her the order and she puts it on Scarus' chest*] I will also bestow upon him a handsome money reward [*a servant hands her a piece of pure gold, she gives it to Scarus who is dejected and speechless*].

Antonius : Now valiant Scarus return to your comrades at arms, let them behold the reward of bravery and valour you earned. Let them also rejoice, let them eat, drink and relax so that they will be fully ready to start a new round tomorrow.

[*Exit Scarus*] Yes, Cleopatra, tomorrow will be

the decisive battle. We'll attack them by land and sea, eventually vanquishing them. I'm positive of that !

1st guard [*Entering in a hurry*] : Master of the East, Emperor Antonius, will you allow me to speak up?

Antonius : Out with it!

1st guard : Oh my lord, news has just arrived that your faithful man and follower, Enobarbus he's not returned to Alexandria after today's battle.

Antonius : What happened to him then ? Speak up ! Is he dead ?

1st guard : I wish he had. That would have been much better.

Antonius : Speak up then ! What happened to him and don't torture me, damn you!

1st guard : He escaped to the enemy camp and joined Octavius' troops.

[Antonius taken aback and lost in thought]

Cleopatra : What a treacherous scoundrel he is! Coward – nay a fool, for the time of victory has come and he'll die of regret for his deeds.

Antonius : Regret or no regret – this is not what concerns us now [*He is silent and meditates for a*

moment] : Guard! send after him all his belongings and possessions with a tender word of thanks for his previous services.

Cloepatra : Is this how you reward treachery ?

Antonius : One has to behave what is appropriate to him, his actions should not be reactions of others [*to the guard*] Begone now, go carry out my orders.

Cleopatra : Why did Enobarbus run away on the very same day that you achieved victory over the enemy ? In truth this really puzzles me!

Antonius : It bereaves me and makes my heart heavy. Today I lost my best friend, my most faithful follower and most efficient commander.

Cleopatra : Don't exaggerate Antonius, for all Egypt supports and backs you, and all are faithful, loyal men. Besides, first and foremost I'm here with you [*She pats him with her fingers so that the expressions on his face change*].

Antonius : As long as you are with me Egypt, may everything go to Octavius, or even to hell. You're earthly paradise, you're the imperishable treasure Cleopatra [*They laugh and are about to leave when they are interrupted by the arrival of the second guard*].

2nd guard : My lord the emperor will you allow me to speak ?

Antonius : Do I have another choice but allow you to speak ? Say what you have and hurry.

2nd guard : News has just reached us my lord emperor that Scarus whom her majesty the queen of Egypt has lavished upon the order of merit and gold ingots has fled out of town! He's gone with his order and his gold ingots heading towards Octavius' camp, and there pledged his allegiance to our enemy ! O ! how I wish my lord if you would permit me to go after him, sneak into the enemy camp and kill Scarus to give him what he rightly deserves for his treachery.

Antonius : No, calm down, these are simple and ordinary matters, they always happen in battles. Go, loyal guard and attend to the duties of your work. Calm down and things will take their normal course.

[*The guard goes out and Antonius rests his head on the palm of his hand, while Cleopatra looks distracted and solemn*].

[*Curtain*]



ACT III

Scene I

[*A high cliff overlooking the decisive gound battlefield which ended in Antonius' and Cleopatra's defeat – The site of the naval battle can also be seen*].

Antonius [*Wandering aimlessly distracted. Close behind walks Eros absolutely silent and staring warily at him*] : There you are ! This licentious whore has betrayed me! This queen who rolled in the beds of two Roman leaders and ruined them. The curse which destroyed them befell me. Woe! Alas! I'm more foolish than them – if she had drenched them in the rotten, stinking sea of lust and voluptousness only once, she made a fool of me and deceived me all that time. What a cunning whore she is ! She deceived me both in warfare and love. She fled the battle of Actium depriving me the chance of an actual encounter with my foe, that boy Octavius ! younger than me in age, experience and audacity. I must admit that I lost my senses in following that treacherous woman what dangers like a blind man not seeing what he's running into. I wish I'd lost my eyesight rather than deserting the battlefield of honour only to come here to roll in lust and prosperity

and the embraces of that coquette of a queen, that flirting, debauched queen. What a catastrophe! I've ruined myself with my own hands! I was most willing to leave everything in the world if she were only sincere in her love! How could I ever trust her now ? It's the stark, naked truth then what they are saying - that she actually visited Herod the king of the Jews by night and secretly! and there she goes again betraying me with the juvenile youth – the glittering super star Octavius. She double crossed me with him to get his favour. They say that she went to meet him in his camp, she thus seduced him with her beauty, and enchanted him with her words, she entrapped him in her snare. Here she pays the price in advance, her fleet submitting to his before the battle near the Alexandrian coast. The crew of her ships embracing his crew. Everybody knew about this treachery – and I was the last to know! As for her land soldiers (soldiers on land) they instantly dropped their weapons and put away their arms – submitting and welcoming Octavius and his soldiers – what a whorish slut she is! she ruined me. She destroyed all my dreams and betrayed me, sold me at the cheapest price.

Eros [*Attempting to mildly alleviate his grief*] : Master Emperor don't be cruel to yourself! Give leave to your faithful servant to talk. I beg you sir [*Kneeling at his feet*].

Antonius : Rise Eros.

Eros [*Rises and beseachingly tells him*] **:** Master Emperor, you know how much I've been faithful in your service – and how I deal honestly with you. Isn't that true?

Antonius : Yes – I don't doubt your faithfulness.

Eros : Well, allow me then to tell you that I don't believe what is said about Cleopatra. She neither deceives not betrays, nor can she ever be treacherous to you. She is a woman born for love. If one loves, one cannnot betray – consult your heart. Do you still love her ?

Antonius : Jupiter the supreme god knows only too well how much I loved her Eros. I doted in her love. I was mad, insane, and now I see that she does not deserve from me all that insanity.

Eros : No, my lord you still adore her, but you did not bar your ears against the rumours which Cleopatra's enemies spread about her. You were shaken by the outcome of the battle – the loss of war, whereas Cleopatra's love for you is equal to all worldly gain.

Antonius : Don't attempt to dissuade me from what I'm bent on doing.

Eros : What are you bent on doing, Emperor ?

Antonius [*Handing him his sword*] **:** This is my sword. Now you have to carry out what you promised to do, to fulfill the oath which you committed yourself to infront of Jupiter the supreme god and the torturer of perjurers. Everything is over for me ! I lost the war, I'm frustrated in love. One stab from you Eros is sufficient to set me free from the torture of despair, from the pain of war and love. Save me Eros, liberate me, kill me!

Olympus : [*Enter Olympus, Cleopatra's physicion*]

My lord, my lord Emperor – Woe! Alas! I'm the most wretched creature on earth. It's my sorry lot that I would be the one to announce .... Cleopatra's death !

Antonius and Eros [*Together in one voice*] **:** Cleopatra's death! Cleopatra is dead – Woe! Alas !

Olympus : Yes, my lord. After both of you lost the war, she was overwhelmed with despair. When news reached her that you were mad with anger at her and held her responsible for the defeat, that you no longer loved but loathed her, she decided to flee this world. She ascended to the tomb, and allowed nobody except her two maids Irene and Charmion to

live with her inside her tomb. There, my lord, she stayed many a day and night without even drinking nor eating anything, nay, not even talking to anyone. All attempts to get her out of the tomb or feed her failed. She thus turned deadly pale. She withered and wasted away. This did not satisfy her, for she ordered that fire would be set to her tomb, she and her two maids became a heap of ashes - O! What a waste of love and fidelity!

[*Exits quickly pretending to weep*]

Antonius : O Eros! With Cleopatra departed from this world, I have nothing more in life to cling to. You Eros, no longer have any excuse or pretext to your promise. Come on! Don't let me down, liberate me from my frailty and despair.

Eros : Won't you relieve me Master of the East from this fatal mission ?!

Antonius : Nay, that who was once the Master of the East entreats you to set him free from his agony and misery.

Eros [*Holding the sword*] **:** Then I beseech you turn your head back away master, for I dare not look you in the face, nor see your setting sun bleeding. [*Antonius turns his head back*

and Eros stabs himself] I die before your sun sets Antonius ! Greatest of men and prime hero ! O wretched is the man who would wait to see you dying infront of his eyes! Adieu Hercules. [*Falls dead*]

Antonius [*Drawing his sword*] **:** What disgrace! Even my noble servant surpasses me in courage and bravery! What shame! He did not kill me as he promised but has taught me the lesson which I'm too tardy to learn [*Stabs himself and falls to ground, while the two guards approach*].

1st guard : How is it that I hear some rattling in throat coming from over there?

2nd guard : The same noise struck may ears. Noises came from that direction, come let's see what happened there.

[*They spot Eros dead and Antonius lying bleeding but still alive*]

Ist guard : That's Eros ! He's dead !

2nd guard : How horrible ! Over there is Antonius, Emperor of the East verging on death.

Antonius [*Very feebly*] : Noble Egyptian guards, relieve me of my pains – with a sharp fatal stab to continue the course I started.

1st guard : My lord, who dares stab the master of the East

– whose loyalty to Egypt, and the queen of Egypt have been both lavish and bounteous ? Your allegiance to the East challenged a belligerent Rome. You are our queen's husband and love, your life is dearly cherished by us.

2nd guard : Cleopatra, queen of Egypt cannot survive without you my lord. We won't deprive her of life and the reason of existence by killing you.

Antonius : Cleopatra isn't then dead ?

1st guard : She approached death more than at any other time, but she's not dead. Without you my lord she's merely existing in a death - like state, she's living in her high tomb preparing herself for depature.

Antonius : But her private physician announced to me that she has set fire to her tomb as well as to herself.

2nd guard : It's the fire of despair and frustration. The fire of a vanquished love which made her send you that news to allay your fury and resentement of her. If she were to know what's happened to you now, she'll surely die before she hears the whole news.

Antonius : Carry me then to her - to Egypt - to die in her embrace.

Scene II

[In the centre stage stands Cleopatra's pyramid – like tomb. It has an interior staircase and a window in its upper part. From the window appear Cleopatra and her maids Charmion and Irene. The two guards enter carrying Antonius]

1st guard : Your highness ... reverend ... queen of Egypt ... we went to seek Antonius at your command, and found him in this state.

2nd guard : Eros stabbed himself and is departed ... but Antonius, stabbing himself brings him very close to death .. for after Olympus had announced to him that you departed to the other world, he decided to join you. When we told him that you're still alive, he asked us to carry him to you.

1st guard : All along he mentioned nothing but your name.

Cleopatra [*Screaming*] **:** Woe! woe! Antonius ... love ... husband ... what have you done to yourself ? Come to me ... ascend.

Antonius [*Feebly*] **:** How can I ascend to you ,.. your pyramid tomb is tremendously high ... for someone who's wounded and feeble as I am .... now in your height I can never reach you ...

stretch out your hand ... help me ... I want you to embrace me ... embrace me Egypt to you.

Cleopatra : Quick Irene, and you Charmian, get the ropes, haul him upwards to us – come on – hurry [*They throw the ropes from the window, the two guards place Antonius on a stretcher which they tie by these ropes. Cleopatra with the two maids haul Antonius upwards*].

Cleopatra [*Exhausted from pulling the rope*] : Up! up! O! Isis help us Isis to pull up this hero, so heavy even in his frailty. Help! O! Isis help!

Charmian and Irene [*Together in one voice*] : Majesty, leave this work to us. You're exhausted.

Cleopatra : No, don't deprive me of this honour. Antonius has almost reached me to my pyramid tomb ... Here he comes [*They pick up Antonius from the window. The stage rotates so that the pyramid tomb is disclosed from the interior*].

Cleopatra [*Noticing how deep the stab in Antonius' stomach*] : Woe ! What calamity ! Get me drugs ! Fetch me physicians ! Get me all medicines for Antonius [*Addressing him*] Love, you won't die ! You won't die ! [*Embracing him to her bosom, his blood stains her hands and cheeks*].

Antonius [*Faintly*] **:** At last ... in Egypt's embrace, I want a glass of wine – I long to sleep.

Cleopatra [*Kissing him*] **:** You'll get all what you desire beloved husband! I'd sacrifice my life for your sake! If you desire to drink from my heartblood, I'd pour it for you to drink [*Charmian gets a glass of wine, Cleopatra hands it to him*] Here you are, from the most delicious, ancient wine in Egypt.

Antonius [*Cleopatra putting the wine glass to his lips*] **:** How ravished – to die in your embrace – people will envy me this death – I'm the luckiest man in the entire world to sleep in your embrace for ever Egypt ... to be burried on the banks of the River Nile, my body will feed alluvial worms ... and they in turn will fertilize the soil .. or burn my body and sprinkle my ashes in the fields of this valley ... my country ... this good earth ... for my country is not where I was born ... but my country is where I'm surrounded with love – happiness – security – peace ... a place where dreams come true ... to feel peace ... stability ... in your embrace Cleopatra I found my country ... happiness and love, security and peace ... on the Egyptian soil I lived my most wonderful days, achieved my most magnificent dreams ... yes, my stay in Egypt was a dream ... a dream ... a dream ... and here I see anew the first dream I had when I first set foot in Egypt.

[*The light becomes gradually dimmer on Antonius and Cleopatra. A faint light, is focused implying dreams where two ladies appear – one is tall, slim and serious – looking, surrounded by some silent children. Her hair, in seven long plaits, hangs loosely over her back. The second lady is young and has a Macedonian nose, wears a crown on her head on top of which is the symbol of the copra snake. From her youthful face emanates enchanting beauty. Both approach a young Roman man, bearing Antonius'features, who sits on a rock holding his head in both hands.*]

First lady : Antonius ... I'm your wife, Antonius mother of your children, I'm Octavia, sister to your comrade at arms and your partner in government Octavianus. I'm Rome and glory, Antonius don't desert me! Antonius I beseach you, I implore you don't desert your children ... I beg you not to destroy your glory. I accept all you've done, cherish all you've acheived, obey all commands. Antonius I'm your legitimate, Roman wife. I'm the loving, caring mother. I'm Law. I'm Rome – come to me. Don't desert me and cause dispute and conflict to separate betwixt you and my brother. The enemy would rejoice in my misery and your destruction. I've disobeyed my brother's orders for your sake amd stayed in your Roman home. I sold everything to keep you, even if you've deserted me hoping that you'll return. I'll stay at home if

you wish. I'll accompany you to war if I can. I want nothing except that you become once more my husband – to look after me and my children.

[*Antonius is about to go toward her when he hears a whispering voice from the other side*]

The Second Lady : Antonius, will you really go to her ? What about me ? I'm love Antonius, I'm the Nile and Egypt. I willingly accepted you to be my love. I bought your love for what this world is worth. They called me a licentious whore, treacherous and debauched, but I didn't bother, for your love is the only important thing in life for me – your love flows in my blood as the Nile flows (does) in the valleys. I'm Egypt Antonius – I staked my life and future to back and support you. I'm Egypt, Antonius who's never perfidious, never breaks its vows to those who support and assist her. It never abandons its lovers, is faithful to whoever defends it – enamoured with all who protect it – faithful to its allies – I'm Egypt, Antonius – cradle of all civilizations. Only peace can establish civilization – Egypt sacrifices all cherished things for peace. I love you Antonius because you believe in peace like me.

1st lady : You lie, your deceptive cunning woman! It's only Roman peace that can extend protection and shelter over all peoples of the East and the Nile valley.

2nd lady : What peace are you talking about ?! Roman peace! it's the peace imposed by the strong and powerful, inflicted by the triumphant vanquishers on us to subjugate and subdue us. You loot our treasures, deprive us of the blessings of liberty and equality. But as for us we call for fraternity between East and West, love and peace – I'm Macedonian, and my love Antonius is Roman, and my people are Greco–Egyptian with Ethiopians, Jews, Arabs and other races. We gathered here to unite and construct life, to erect the true edifice of peace. What we desire for all people alike – both east and west is life, love and peace.

1st lady : Honey words! All the more incredible as they come from a bewitching snake. It's the deception of the cunning.

2nd lady : Nay, it's the aspiration of Humanity, the hopes of those whose lands are usurped, those who suffer under the yoke of submission. If I were deceptive or cunning I would have taken the course of the defeated and vanquished, but I'll remain firm and invinicble for love has

absolutely penetrated my bosom (heart) and possesses (obssesses) me and Antonius. Kiss me Antonius!

Antonius [*Confusing, between the dream and the reality*]: Here I come Cleopatra ! Here ... I ... come ... love ... Here in my embrace, [*looking to the other side*] as for you ... be gone ... be gone Rome, may you sink in the Tiber or even in hell river, don't chase me even in my death.

Cleopatra : No, you won't die, you won't die!

Antonius [*Producing a death rattle*] : Here I come Cleopatra ... Here I come Egypt [*final silence*].

Cleopatra [*After a moment's silence*] **:** Woe! Alas! Antonius is dead! [*Beating her bosom and dipping her face in Antonius' wound*] Antonius is dead ... O sun, the time has come for you to set. May an earthquake shake the earth. May the sky be struck by thunder ! Submerge O Nile, with your flooding water all the universe! Shake Egypt ! Antonius is dead ! Antonius is dead ! [*She weeps*].

Scene III

[*Cleopatra's tomb where the queen looks out to talk to the other characters. Malek, king of Arabs enters*]

Malek : O Cleopatra! sister! as soon as I heard what befell to you and your departed husband and our dear Egypt I rushed to you.

Cleopatra : Welcome in Egypt ... your second home.

Malek : I beseach you to descend from your high pyramid tomb and come back to life.

Cleopatra : It's too late to comply with your request ... I'll never leave my place.

Malek : But Octavius whose troops invaded Egypt will not leave you, he will arrest you. What he most desires is that you would adorn his triumphal procession in Egypt. This is a shameful, disgraceful fate which we do not accept for a dignified Egyptian queen like you. You're our sister in viccinity and destiny, we would be offeneded to see you chained in shackles, and driven by slaves and ruffians in the streets of Rome behind the triumphant Octavianus.

Cleopatra : I'd like to set your mind at peace on this issue. I promise you that Octavianus won't get of me what he desires.

Malek : Well, come then with me to my kingdom and there you'll get what you desire. If you should want to marry we'll marry you to one of our princes. If you should desire kingship you'll be our queen, or we would even offer you part of our land to set up a kingdom for you and your issue.

Cleopatra : No for I who took Antonius for a husband, would never accept anyone to succeed him, who he is. I would rather be engulfed by the crocodiles of the Nile, eaten by the worms of its silt than become a queen anywhere else other than Egypt. Whoever ascended the Egyptian throne once would never be satisfied by all the thrones of the world in its stead.

Malek : Then I have nothing except one wish to aspire to. I beg you to realize it for me, for it's my people's demand in my kingdom.

Cleopatra : I won't hesitate as long as this lies in my capacity.

Malek : Then let your children grow up with ours, eating, drinkinig and playing together, studying the same lessons, speaking the same language, praying at the same temples, we hope that in future they can construct that region, by love and co-operation to forget and eradicate the mistakes pitfalls of the past.

Cleopatra : Arab king, this is my dearly cherished wish. I'd be grateful to you if you adopt my children. The Egyptian people would always remember your favours.

Malek : I will see to it that both your children and mine will be brought up according to the principles that you've always advocated – freedom for all peoples, fraternity among human kind, equality between East and West, love and peace. Farewell queen of peace.

[*He leaves, while Herod, the Jewish king enters*].

Herod : O dear Cleopatra ! How beautiful is your pyramid tomb ! I love this pyramid shape in all things. D'you know why ?

Cleopatra : Why king of Jews ?

Herod : Because my Jewish ancestors built the Egyptian pyramids.

Cleopatra : That's another Jewish myth, Herod! It's a lie which in no way belittles or detracts from Egypt and the Egyptians. It's a disgrace and shame to those who utter it. Egypt cannot deny that it's a hospitable country absorbing all races, embracing all civilizations, without any racial discrimination or ethnic discrepancy, but ...

Herod : No matter ? This wasn't anyway what I came for to negotiate with you, dear queen.

Cleopatra : Why then have you come ?

Herod : After Nicholas the Damascan, the Jewish tutor to your children fled, he kept me abreast of what happened and talked to me a lot about the deterriorating conditions in Egypt, hence I've come to give you some advice.

Cleopatra : What advise king of the Jews ?

Herod [*Looking around him*] : I'd rather climb to where you are to whisper in your ears what I wish to say.

Cleopatra : No one is allowed to climb up here. Say all what you've got boudly. Don't be afraid for no one except us will hear you.

Herod [*In a whispering voice*] **:** Where are you children ?

Cleopatra : A noble king adopted them.

Herod : [*Whispering*] : And your treasures ?

Cleopatra : What do you want of my treasures ?

Herod : Nothing, except that I'm afraid they would fall in the Romans' hand. What I'm proposing to you now, dear queen, is that you'd hand me all your treasures to keep under lock and key for

your children in posterity. Heh, what do you say ?

Cleopatra : So this is your precious advice? What a typically Jewish advice! and a one precious too! Don't covet the gold treasures, they won't do you any good, for you should know that after the fall of Egypt in Roman hands, everything in the East collapses. You, your gold and all your kingdom will be swept by the storm - no freedom, no security for the East after the fall of Egypt. Begone now, king of Jews and fetch yourself another bargain.

[*Herod exits, while Octavius enters, preceded by twelve Imperial guards carrying distinguishing emblems: the double axe surrounded by cudgels*].

Octavius : Queen of Egypt ! Wherefore do you inflict upon yourself all that ? Why do you imprison yourself ? It's such an unbecoming behaviour on your part - You're a queen of royal ancestry. Your country is deeply rooted in civilization, pomp and magnificence. We Romans love and respect Egypt and we will honour its people. Now that Antonius is dead we have no conflicts betwixt us.

Cleopatra : Emperor of Rome, Cleopatra has lost all desire in life, and lost all hope in safety. I'm

vanquished, defeated in all fields. If you earnestly want to honour my deep – rooted royal ancestry, and the glory of great Egypt, then grant me my sole request in preserving the glorious throne of Egypt for my children. As for me, whether I live or depart from this world, I've absolutely lost everything, everything is over and done with.

Octavius : This is precisely what I do not desire to hear from you. Why are you so much inclined to death ? Keep alive Cleopatra for in your life there are infinite benefits for you, for your children, for your people and for us Romans, except that you die in grief over Antonius ?

Cleopatra : Rather in grief over Egypt which has lost its freedom, its dignity and its right for self-determination. Cleopatra thus has lost all cause to cling to life.

Octavius : O queen of Egypt, if you really aspire to preserve Egypt and its freedom, duty dictates that you would descend from your pyramid tomb, and negotiate over matters concerning your country. As for your imprisoning yourself in your tomb and abstaining from food and drink and insisting on killing yourself prematurely, this is illogical and indiscreet.

Cleopatra [*Straightens the crown over her head*] **:** Well, here I come to you,

[*Descends the interior stairs of the pyramid tomb*] to negotiate with you Octavianus. I'm most willing to leave no stone unturned for the freedom of Egypt [*she reaches the ground*] Here I stand in front of you Emperor of Rome, listening to the terms you dictate me.

Octavius : What I solely desire of you is to trust me fully that I'll be a man of my word, besides your absolute trust in me. I desire of you nothing but to look after your personal affairs and not to leave your dwindling body perish and collapse because of your abstinence from drink and food. Don't let grief devastate the radiant beauty of your face. Remember that it's better for you to remain as you have always been - strong and beautiful.

Cleopatra : What should I do with my strength and beauty, Octavius, now that I've lost the mirror in which I beheld my beauty and strength ?

Octavius : You mean Antonius ?

Cleopatra : Nay, I mean the freedom of Egypt and the strength of my people. These are the things that made me what I am - the strong, beautiful Cleopatra, but now the anguish and defeat of my people have swept my beauty and strength.

Octavius : However, you can preserve the strength of your people and beauty for yourself if you act (behave) wisely and conduct negotiations with

us, patiently and discreetly. We Romans desire no more than to to realize our vocation which our Roman people have taken upon themselves ever since Aenas' time and his grandson Romulus. Those who comply with the terms of our Roman peace will be treated favourably by us. As for those who refuse, we are thus not to blame if we punish them.

Cleopatra : But, Octavianus, peace is not imposed by the force of weapons! Genuine peace springs from feelings of fraternity and love, inspired by the true desire of the cultural co-existence between different peoples. Peace, Octavianus, is a lovely cherished goal, imposing itself because it is much desired and does not call for weapons. Peace, Octavius, like beauty, has its own charm, attraction and lovers.

Octavius [*As in a monologue or talking to himself*] : What a charming witch you are, even when you're a withered flower !

Cleopatra : Peace Octavius is not sought except by peace itself. It's like love you don't get it except by love only. As for war, it has no aim to it except imposing power and looting wealth [*She is silent for a moment*] Emperor of Rome, I wish that you promise me to preserve the throne of Egypt for my sons.

Octavius : This is an easy matter.

Cleopatra : As for Cleopatra's treasures, the treasures of the Orient and the storehouse of the munificent (abundant) Nile valley for thousands of years, my jewellery and all I possess, I no longer need any of them now, I leave them to you, here's a list of them.

[*She hands him a rolled papyrus paper*]

Selekis [*Suddenly interrupting*] : Venerable Emperor of Rome, triumphant leader ! The queen of Egypt is double – crossing (or deceiving) you for this list is incomplete, she's hidden most of her treasures from you.

Cleopatra [*Rushing in a fury and slapping Celekos' face*]**:** Impudent rogue, cowardly traitor [*addressing Octavius*] Emperor of Rome, it's true that I kept some of my jewels and put them in my tomb, for it's the custom of my countrymen to bury in their tombs part of the worldly riches they accumulate throughout their lives. As an Egyptian, I should not violate ancient Egyptian customs and traditions unless I'm forced to. Do you allow me to keep part of my jewels in my tomb ?

Octavius : Rather, keep all your jewels. This is not what preoccupies my mind now. All what I want to

keep is you my queen. Remaining alive is my true treasure.

Cleopatra : How inconceivably strange ! How incredible ! You, the truimphant leader and great Emperor seek to talk to me in my tomb, you're shaken by my calamities and treat me kindly and amicably, while one of my men servants betrays me and bites the hands that extended to him in bountiful generosity. Oh, it's true that disasters are the real tests of people's metals.

Octavius [*To his guards*] **:** Arrest this man [*pointing to Selikios*] Put him in prison for this is the traitor's punishment. As for you Cleopatra, attend well to yourself and your health and take things easily. You will be treated by us in the best of manners. It would be much better if you left your tomb. How easy it would be then to negotiate all matters. Just allow me a few days to attend to my affairs and prepare myself to leave to Rome where weighty matters await me. Before I leave, I'll grant you all your requests at your heart's content. This is what I promise you.

[*He smiles and exits with his men. Cleopatra climbs to her tomb*].

Cleopatra [*From the balacony of the tomb*] **:** When Antonius smiled the sun brightened, the moon

smiled whole – heartedly, the stars in the heavenly sphere danced to the tunes of the eternal, cosmic music while I soared in ecstasy in space. His smile was bliss, peace, security. In his smile I discerned the salvation of my people, but Octavianus' sly smile conceals a myriad threats. In it I see a snare of a smile which proves without doubt, that my life in my pyramid – tomb in anticipation of any inevitable death is far better than falling under the mercy of the sby, smiling man. He's gone, believing that he deceived me, not knowing that he is the one who is gulled.

Scene IV

[*Cleopatra's tomb from the interior*].

Dolabella : O, Cleopatra, Queen of the Orient, goddess of beauty and charm, I've come to report to you confirmed news. Upon your orders, I pursued the matter probing into Octavius' intentions I came to know that he is intent and resolved as your majesty expects, on taking you with him to Rome. His men have told him that his countrymen won't consider him a triumphant, victorious conqueror unless your majesty, and your children if possible, adorn his truimhpant procession in Rome. They also added that the Roman Senate won't be convinced that the Roman peace has become deep-rooted in the Eastern provinces if you are not arrested and imprisoned. They also told him that the Roman people are waiting on tenterhooks to set eyes on Cleopatra, the bewitching queen at their mercy, enrobed in subjugation, lowly, humiliated and debased. Then, and then only, will they sigh with relief. Your majesty queen of the Orient, in three days' time Octavius, with some of his troops, will return to Rome across Syria. It's most likely that he'll send you with whoever of your children and your men he can arrest directly to Rome via sea. I've

come to inform you this, and will be gone in haste as we are actually about to depart with Octavius from Egypt. I don't know should I envy myself for being so lucky as to set eyes on you now, the paragon of beauty even amidst so much woe, or should I feel sorry to see you for the last time while I break to you such disturbing news ?. In all events I'm proving my faithfulness sincerity to you. If I had the means, I would and sacrifice my life for your sake queen of love and constancy.

Cleopatra : Don't preoccupy your mind with my fate Dolabella ! You have served me with utmost sincerity. Before his departure, Antonius bid me not to trust any of Octavius' men except you. Here you are – you've accomplished your misson in the best way possible. As for me, I clearly perceive my ultimate destination. There's nothing that hinders me from my noble aim.

Dolabella : I don't wish to bother you, nor destory your precious moments in unnecessary curiosity which almost urges me to insist on knowing what you exactly intend to do. However, before I depart, I bid you farewell desiring you to grant me a wish which I have always borne concealed deep in my heart.

Cleopatra : What is it that you desire, dear Dolabella ?

Dolabella : To kiss our royal hand [*she extends her hand for him to kiss*] What a beautiful, pretty hand. How many a king bowed to kiss it as I'm doing now. I'm absolutely positive that these royal hands will not be chained by shackles of humiliation and degradation. The gods created these hands to extend with love and peace to all nations and peoples. These hands were never made to be imprisoned in darkness, not for war, but rather to strew peace flowers everywhere. Cleopatra I supplicate all gods – Egyptian, Greek and Roman to support and aid you – peace be on you .

[*He weeps and exits*]

Cleopatra : Irene, Charmian – come and prepare my exquisite bath, fill it with perfumed water, pour in it matured wine, adorn it with flowers and roses. Burn icense, offer the gods all offerings.

Charmian : We've prepared everything my queen, for we intuitively feel your desires even before you announce them. We've perpared your bath, your royal robes everything lies in wait for your magnificent beauty.

Irene : Arise get up my queen, come to your bath

[*After a short while they return having finished the royal bath*].

Cleopatra [*In all her royal splendour and pomp wearing extermely bright colours*] **:** D'you remember these garments ?

Irene and Charmian [*In one voice*] : We most certainly remember them very well. We even relive today the events of that day when you put on these garments for the first time.

Cleopatra : What sincere and great companions you are! You even share with me my dreams. Oh friends! Have you prepared the lunch banquet?

Irene and Charmian [*in a unanimous voice*] **:** We have, your majesty.

Cleopatra : Today, I desire even a more exquisite banquet, the richest in all life.

Charmian : What do you particularly desire, your majesty?

Cleopatra : Snow–white bread made of Egyptian wheat before the Romans set hands on it. I yearn for the delicious wine made from the Nile Valley vines before the invaders' horses trampled and crushed them with their hooves. Oh! how I desire the cheese made from the toiling peasants' cows and figs from their fertile, abundant orchards.

Irene : We have abundant amounts of all that you desire in our banquet, your majesty. The banquet lies in wait for you [*They sit at the table*].

Cleopatra : Fill the glass to the brim. Fetch me the cup which when Antonius drank from, the whole world became intoxticated and drank to his health. He became like Dionysius surrounded by his followers and attendants. Oh, those faithful, boisterous fellows ! I want to be intoxicated this very moment for I feel an ecstasy flowing in my limbs, one I've never felt before [*They hand her a cup. She takes off a gold ring from her finger and reads the inscription on it*] "To Isis of Egypt from Dionysius" This was Antonius' gift to me on our first meeting in Tarssus. [*She drops the ring in the cup and shakes it hard*] May Dionysius melt in Isis' cup then! [*she gulps the wine in extreme ratpture and is overtaken by an intoxication ecstasy. As in a reverie she talks dreamily*] He was an enchanting river – a gilded barge.

Charmian : What river your majesty ? What barge ?

Cleopatra [*As if she has not heard, or as if in a monologue*] : Its waves were squealing with joy, engaging in dreamy dances. On the Nile banks, palm trees bowed from their majsetical height to kiss the face of this clear river. Birds flirted with flowers on their boughs – It was an enchanting, bewitching river. It embraced my barge which I used when I first met my love. I

had loved him even before I set eyes on him. I always felt that there was something that united us together. Oh, how his conduct enthralled me and magnetized me ! He was a man born for love, and yet was so daring on the battlefield for when he set foot on its battlefields he showed his valour and all was done for the sake of peace. Yes it's true that he loved peace and life. He wanted to live free and unshackled by any chain – He believed in fraternity of all human beings – no difference between a Roman an a Greek, a Western and an Eastern except by good and virtue. For him all humans were equal. This is what I adored him for and this is why I was magnetized to him. This is why I went to him across the river passionately yielding up to him.

Irene : He was also your passionate lover (adorer) even before he set eyes on you. His men told us how he spent more than a week on the river bank waiting on tenterhooks to meet you. He looked everywhere like a bewildered, distracted man, in the hope of getting a glimpse of your barge.

Charmian : How can we ever forget the eagerness of the Tarssus natives themselves to set eyes on your pretty face. They all deserted their houses, their gathering places and streets, to linger for

days on end on the river banks, expecting and yearning for the moment of your arrival.

Cleopatra [*In a dreamy note*] **:** Yes the people of Tarssus loved him so much. But no sooner had they glimpsed the gilded Egyptian barge on the river, and heard the silver oars whispering love words to the dancing waves, than they crowded on the banks throwing flowers and sweet basil, tossing jewels and pearls at the waves. They started to cheer in choric, rhythmical tunes which the hills around us reverberated "Long live Isis, long live Isis - May victory befall you".

Irene : They whispered amongst themselves in overwhelming rapture "The Egyptian Isis has come to meet the Roman Dionysius to set the East free from the yoke of western tyranny".

Charmian : Some even built temples to commemorate your sacred marriage even before you met.

Cleopatra [*Dreamily*] **:** Antonius, my love, our encounter in Tarssus on the banks of the River Cydnus was that of passion and beauty, of love and peace. It was your salvation and mine and all peoples of the East! A rebellion against Rome [*Somewhat becoming semi-conscious*] How I yearn to meet you again! How ruthless (heartless) to you and myself for being so tardy

and lagging behind in joining you ! Forgive me Antonius, I'll be by your side and within your embrace in a few seconds. Charmian, oh Charmian!

Charmian : Yes my noble queen.

Cleopatra : Am I enchanting ? Where's the royal crown ? Place it on my head.

Charmian [*Placing the crown*] **:** You are most enchanting my queen. You have become young again as you were in the prime of youth when you met Antonius for the first time.

Cleopatra : Irene, oh noble Irene!

Irene : At my beautiful majesty's service.

Cleopatra : Go fetch me the basket of Egyptian figs - the golden basket. You know it. Make haste, Irene.

Charmian : Nay, your highnes. It's I who'll get it.

Irene : No, I am the one who'll get it [*They both rush to the basket. Irene reaches first. She gets a bar of pure gold from the folds of her clothes with which she dallies with a copra snake hidden in the basket*] : Get up, up my love, you've been sleeping for long, come that I may kiss you – The kiss of immortal eternity [*She places her lips on the opening of the basket and instantly falls dead*].

Cleopatra [*Getting up, taking the basket by herself*] **:** How I envy you, noble Irene for you have won Antonius' first kiss. It's likely that at this moment you are enfolded in his embrace. May you enjoy each other's company! But I will not allow the second kiss to slip away from me [*She places her lips on the opening of the golden basket , falling to the ground while still embracing the basket*] How delicious this kiss is ! Never have I tasted its like before – Never shall I taste it ever after. Your kiss Antonius this time is rapturous – immortal – in it – there's love – peace – and – eternal serenity.

[*She is dead silent*]

Charmian [*Stretches her hand to the basket. She is stung by the snake. She staggers, falling near Cleopatra. She stretches her hand with difficulty, to straighten the crown on Cleopatra's head)*] **:** Oh Cleopatra may the last thing I do in my life is to straigten the crown on your pretty head ... so that ... you ... die ... as ... a queen of royal ... ancestry ... as ... you have ... always ... been.

[*Octavius and his guards enter*]

Octavius : O horror ! Cleopatra's dead ! all my dreams are squandered ! My plans are aborted, dashed, defeated ! But here's Charmian –- she's still

alive. Help her ! Save her!

[*His men try to save her*]

Charmian : Too late Octavius

Octavius : Who killed Cleopatra?

Charmian : [*Pointing to the golden basket*] He ... killed ... her ... Antonius ... he's there ... in ... the ... basket ... yes ... Antonius ... called ... her ... and ... she ... obeyed ... the ... call ... of ... love ... and ... peace ... she ... left ... the world ... behind ... for ... you ... you ... man ... of ... this ... world.

[*She drops dead*]

Octavius [*Looking at Cleopatra*] **:** Enchanting in death as in life ... Beautiful, graceful and lovely even in the clasps of death. Behold her ! She's become youthful, mighty and graceful again ! A strange vivacity flows in her ! She's smiling at death with two rosy lips as if kissing another Antonius !

(*Curtain*)

Commercial Press - Kalyoub - Egypt